ENCHANTED FORAGING
WILDCRAFTING FOR HERBAL REMEDIES, RITUALS, AND A MAGICAL LIFE
EBONY GHEORGHE
ILLUSTRATED BY HEATHER POWERS

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RUNNING PRESS

PHILADELPHIA

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INTRODUCTION

My name is Ebony Gheorghe, and I wear a few hats, to put it simply. I am a wife, mother, geoscientist, and am currently training in Aikido sword and weapons. I am also passionate about connecting with Nature and expressing this through wildcrafting, foraging, walks, reading, and through workshops taught by experts in their fields. My studies in geology, environmental sciences, and the outdoors changed the way I saw our planet. I started to view aspects of Earth in different ways. This made me feel small, especially seeing how much reverence and life was in everything around me. Feeling small in this sense was enlightening, for it offered me new and different perspectives from which to think about my life. From there, the wonder of Nature continued to blossom.

My background is a bit of a long journey of finding myself, but whose isn't? Being drawn to study the land from a young age, I remember choosing courses of study that gave me any opportunity to be outdoors or to have adventure.

While attending college, my love for the outdoors was enriched and given a more theoretical and practical framework. I remember one time, during a geology field trip, standing at the bottom of Coire an t-Sneachda in the Scottish Highlands. A coire is a valley formed by glacial erosion. It is also sometimes called a cirque. The climb up had been through the snow. My classmates and I were all tired but somehow energized as we neared our destination. As we got close, we could feel the cold breeze kissing our faces. The wind welcomed us with a freezing embrace. I looked at the beautiful landform and slopes of rocky debris, the snow and ice. I felt something I had never felt before, a sense of peace and that my inner child was content. I wanted to know everything about this place, the things that

formed it and were part of it.

Standing at the base of that coire, the world felt magical to me; the way it inspired my thoughts excited me and gave my imagination new range. I am not the first person who has felt this way. In different cultures throughout history, people have turned to Nature for knowledge and healing, regarding it as a sacred entity. For our ancestors, learning about Nature wasn't just an activity or hobby but a way of life. (This is the same even nowadays for some people.) They gathered wild resources—flowers, leaves, roots, tree barks and sap, resin, berries, and mushrooms—to survive, but they also regarded Nature spiritually, believing it to have the power to support harmonious living, in ways that can't be quantified.

During my previous career-related jobs, I worked between geographical information systems, testing soils and rocks onshore and offshore on the North Sea. This opened my eyes to the complexity of life that we walk upon and interact with each day, how delicate and intricate ecosystems are, the way everything affects everything else. When my husband and I first moved to Oxford, I started learning about and creating more with plants, flowers, and trees, and began fostering a relationship with Nature that has not only enhanced my scientific understanding of it, but made room for a deeper, more spiritual connection with Nature to take root. The journey began with an interest in being outdoors, mapping terrain, and geomorphology (study of landforms and features of a terrain). This turned into being outdoors and in woodlands as a form of therapy and learning to make my own skin and hair products infused with plants. Where we used to live, we were surrounded by grass and trees, trails for walking, and farms. Looking out into the garden was like a scene from a fairy tale, with bunnies, pheasants, and muntjac deer playing around. Our garden was free and wild, and luckily we had a landlord who also believed in rewilding your greenery to support pollinators. We had Queen Anne's lace, yarrow, clovers, lady's bedstraw, nettle, mugwort, crab apple trees, hawthorns, sea buckthorns, and rowan, just to name some of our garden's bounty.

What really sold me on the world of plants and their properties is the powerhouse that is stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*). As I learned more about it, I was blown away by its benefits not only for hair but allergies. The natural antihistamine, high-vitamin properties drew me to dive deeper. My husband is from Romania, and there they are big on using plants and

mushrooms for food and health. Especially in the countryside, nettle, or *urzici*, was used for hair health as an herbal rinse and shampoo substitute back in the day when mixed with cider vinegar. Today, it is still commonly eaten, sautéed and pureed and mixed with potatoes and garlic. So, my introduction to this wonderful world of plants was through folk stories of uses of this natural superfood.

From my own culture and heritage, herbal medicine has been used as a backbone for supporting health and medical facilities. I did not really know much about this, though, while growing up in England, as in African culture, herbal remedies are seen as closely tied to witchcraft, which is feared or seen as taboo by many. No matter your background or experience, Nature is accessible to you, and can be worked with, as long as you seek it. In this book, we'll explore how people past and present have made sense of their connection to Earth, but know that your own connection—the one that you develop and nurture, hopefully using some of the advice from this book—belongs to you, and you get to define what it looks like.

In Ghana, certain plants used to be used as part of traditional ceremonies or festivals for spiritual cleansing, as they were believed to offer protection and drive away evil spirits. Our relationship with Nature and all that surrounds us stems from this sort of ancestral knowledge. In our modern desire to reconnect with Nature, it's clear that such knowledge was never lost, but can only be rediscovered. Foraging has allowed me to rediscover!—to connect with Nature in more intentional ways, and to be present in my surroundings in all seasons of the year and of my life. This ancient practice, also called wildcrafting, was the thread that tied all my interests together, and along with my husband and daughter, it is my reason to exist. In present times, when we have science, modern medicine, and grocery stores at our disposal, many might wonder, So, why would we make our own balms? Why would we pick berries to make a jam when we could just buy it in a jar? Re-creating and learning from the past gives you a moment out of your busy world to breathe and focus on a craft. The benefits of such meditative practices as working with your hands or taking walks have been scientifically proven to improve mental health, especially for those who have anxiety or depression or simply lead a stressful life.

So, I prompt you to take a step out into the wild side and connect with the natural resources around you. This does not necessarily mean lifestyle

change; however. if that resonates with you, that’s great. This could be as simple as consciously making your own tea infusions now and then for whatever herbal relief you need, picking blackberries when they’re in season, or going for a walk to admire the flowers, trees, plants—bringing your awareness to the little and big things that Nature provides.

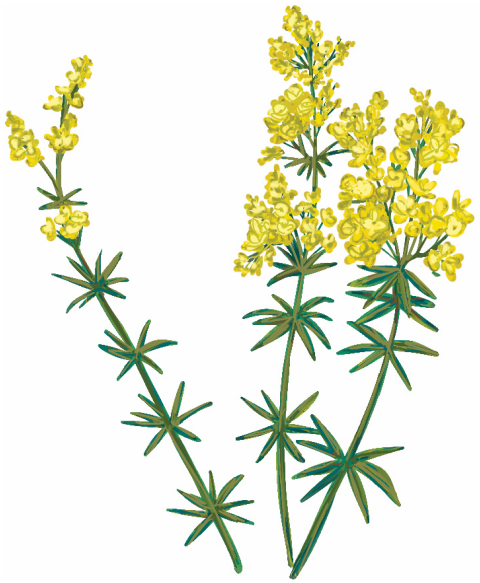
A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Foraging is the act of gathering wild resources. **Wildcrafting** is the act of using or creating with the wild resources gathered.

Sometimes these words are used interchangeably. For the purposes of this book, I will be using these terms in the contexts described here. While writing about wildcrafting, I will include other botanicals that you can grow or buy.

A plant that is technically classed as a weed will also be referred to as a wildflower or plant.

The term **herbs** will be used in reference to herbaceous plants with nutritious and medicinal properties. Otherwise, I will refer to shrubs and trees by their name.



PART ONE

BEGINNING YOUR FORAGING JOURNEY

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Before you start foraging, whether you have done it before or are completely new to it, there are a few things to keep in mind:

NEVER eat or use something that you're not 100 percent certain about. Double and triple check, and then check again to be sure about what you have found. If you can't identify a plant, it's probably not a good idea to touch it, much less ingest it into your body. Mother Nature can be a gentle teacher, inviting you to explore with an open embrace, but at the same time, she can be harsh and humbling. Keep in mind she holds the potential for medicine, food, and other resources in such plants as echinacea, nettles, and chanterelles, but she can also be poisonous, as is the case with such plants as deadly nightshade, foxgloves, hemlock, hemlock water dropwort, fly agaric (toxic on ingestion), death caps and webcaps, just to name a few.

Proceed with adequate caution. I don't suggest the beginners start foraging plants from the carrot family (Apiaceae or Umbelliferae) when at least four species in that family are known to be poisonous. When plants or mushrooms are poisonous, the effects can vary from mild upset stomach to vomiting, to death. That is a pretty large range. You may be eager to begin wildcrafting with what you've found, but the best way to nurture your excitement is to take things slow. Knowledge will collect eventually, and in kinder ways than by eating (or touching) something you shouldn't have.

Consider sustainability. As foraging becomes more popular, fungi and psilocybin have received more media coverage than ever. These wonderful living beings provide medicine, food, and also tidy up the land. Not to mention, they're gorgeous and strange, and endlessly fun to look at. However, this recent obsession for mushrooms has resulted in hordes of people overharvesting or rushing to harvest them when they have not been properly identified. Don't pick something just to post a picture on social

media. Appreciation and observation can be expressed without the continued human need for possession.

Respect the plants and the wild. Related to sustainability, when you plan to harvest, keep in mind that these are living beings and that being thankful to them is a good gentle practice of gratitude. When I harvest plants, I tend to ask for permission. Sometimes, I forget because, after all, I am human. I believe saying thank-you is important and almost completes the cycle of the activity for the time you have set aside for it. It's up to you how or whether you voice this gratitude.

Mind the law. It's important to remember that some places may not be yours to roam. This could be because it could be someone's property, home, or protected land. Land legislation will differ depending on where you are. If you're not sure about the laws where you are, a search on the internet never hurts.

Listen to your body. Check precautions for anything you plan to use topically or internally. Something that's perfectly fine and beneficial for one person may not sit well with another, depending on preexisting health conditions, such as allergies. Listen to your body and to your doctor's advice.

TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

You may or may not be confident already in identifying and matching the description of certain common plants, such as dandelions, daisies, primrose, or blackberry. If not, these are great examples of beginner plants to get started with and practice identifying. For anyone who is a beginner or still building up their plant knowledge, here are a few tips:

- **Learning is different for everyone, so find the method that best suits you.** I learn best audibly and visually, specifically when it comes to foraging and plant identification. I start by taking photos of the plants I want to learn more about. Then, I refer to plant identification apps or websites, which can help narrow down what family, genus, and species the plant belongs to. Such modern applications can be handy in providing an idea of what poisonous look-alikes may be blending in the landscape. However, these apps are not always the most accurate. Most of the time, they give you a few different species that your plant could be, so it is a bit like a treasure hunt. Which leads to the next tip…

- **Refer to books and the internet to verify your identification.** Herbal medicine books are incredibly useful, as they go into more depth about the healing properties of plants than do even some foraging books. If you are looking for wild edible plants, certain books cover just that topic and have recipes to pair with them. Libraries are the place to go if you can't purchase books. They offer an abundance of knowledge, and all of it is free. The more you practice identifying and recognizing the characteristics of a plant, the more familiar and confident you will become in identifying certain plant families, and this will lead you naturally to distinguishing their similarities and differences.

- **Join a community.** There are various online forums and groups you can join, where people help one another identify what they've found. Joining

one of these groups is easy and can be encouraging if you are just starting out. Last but not least, if you can, get out and join a foraging workshop led by a professional. This is a great way to spend some time learning with like-minded people, and to build community around a shared interest.

IDENTIFICATION AND HARVESTING

When it comes to identifying plants, it is good to do a few checks and keep in mind some basic plant biology. Look at each of the plant's characteristics separately, then as a whole. In this chapter, you'll see some commonly used vocabulary that helps to break down certain aspects of a plant, making it easier to identify. In general, it's good to begin thinking about plants this way, classifying their various parts and characteristics. I find websites, such as the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG)'s index of terms webpage, very useful to help describe all the terms you may encounter when it comes to plants. Using books, such as *Enchanted Foraging*, and other resources can make the task of identifying seem much more manageable and less intimidating.

Identify such features as:

LEAVES

Leaves are incredibly varied and complex. You can go into a whole other level of specifics or subgroups of features, such as the leaf base or even petiole, the part that attaches the leaf to the stem. To keep it simpler, here is a list of common and general leaf characteristics.

SHAPE:

- Linear; e.g., grass
- Ovate or oval; e.g., rose (*Rosa* spp.)
- Palmately lobed; e.g., maple (*Acer* spp.) and horse chestnut

(*Aesculus hippocastanum*)
- Pinnately lobed; e.g., oak (*Quercus* spp.)
- Lanceolate; e.g., white willow (*Salix alba*)
- Sagittate; e.g., cuckoopint or lords-and-ladies *(Arum maculatum)* or broadleaf arrowhead *(Sagittaria latifolia)*

EDGES:
- Smooth; e.g., beech (*Fagus* spp.)
- Serrated; e.g., silver birch (*Betula pendula*)

STRUCTURE:
- Palmately compound; e.g., horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*)
- Pinnately compound; e.g., rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)
- Acicular or needlelike; e.g., pine (*Pinus* spp.)

TEXTURE:
- Rough; e.g., comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*)
- Smooth and velvety; e.g., mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*)

LEAF ARRANGEMENT ON STEM: opposite; e.g., the mint family, Labiatae; also alternate; e.g., dandelion (*Taraxacum* spp.)
Look at the bottom of the stem of the plant. Are the leaves low on the ground as opposed to standing tall? This is likely to be identified as a basal rosette, meaning that the leaves are arranged in a circular shape. Examples of this include dandelion (*Taraxacum officianale*) and hairy bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*).
Alternatively, you might find the leaves growing along the stem; e.g. bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*).

FLOWERS

PETALS:

- How many are there?
- Are they clustered or separate?
- How do they lie? Overlapped or spaced apart?

STAMEN:

- What colors are the stamen?
- How are the anthers (stalk that carries the pollen) arranged?

BUDS:

- Buds can form leaves or flowers and are found either on the top end of the plant or on the smaller stalks. You can identify a leaf bud as it presents as plumper in comparison to a flower bud.
- How do the buds form on the top of the stems?
- How do they look, feel, and smell?

STEM:

- Coloring; e.g., herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum*) can be identified by its maroon red stems.
- Markings; e.g., hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), a member of the carrot family, can be identified by reddish-purple markings.
- Other aspects: Is the stem hollow? How tall is it? Does it have texture; e.g., is it hairy?

BERRIES OR FRUITS

- Do the fruits grow in clusters or pairs?
- What shape are the seeds? Do they have grooves in them?

When you identify plants in a book, the nomenclature will either be in their common name or in their bimodal Latin names, in this order and style:
Family

Genus
epithet (species name)
spp. means all species of the genus; e.g., *Rosa* spp. refers to all species of rose.

For example: primrose's Latin nomenclature breaks down as:
Primulaceae
Primula
vulgaris (species name)

Or dandelion:
Asteraceae
Taraxacum officinalis

FORAGING ESSENTIALS

You don’t need too much when foraging, but be sure to have these items:

- A bag, foraging pouch, or basket for harvesting
- Water bottle to stay hydrated
- Gloves to protect your hands
- Gardening scissors
- Identification book or app
- Notebook and writing utensil, to take notes as you explore
- Camera or phone to photograph all the wonderful things you find

When harvesting, keep in mind:

- **Where you are cutting matters.** Cut about 2½ inches (5 cm) from the top of the plant. It is not necessary to uproot a plant unless you will use the plant’s roots as well. This way, when you leave the root alone, the plant can regrow.
- **Poisonous plants.** Keep in mind that some plants cause photo-chemical reactions if you brush against them and are exposed to sunlight. An example of this is with giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), so approach with caution when observing, as you can get a nasty burn reaction if the sap from this plant gets on your skin. This is also why it’s crucial to wear gloves. Make sure you check for the look-alikes to poisonous plants; for example, poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), which causes a nasty skin reaction, notably has three leaves that appear

together. This can be mistaken for Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), which is a harmless vine look-alike with five leaves appearing together.

LOCATION

- **Harvest away from possible pollution or contamination.** This can include air pollution or chemical contamination through soil. This can be in the form of pesticides or herbicides that have been sprayed on plants or whole areas. Specifically think about areas near roadsides (or picture-perfect manicured lawns) in neighborhoods as well as areas that are maintained by local organizations. This can sometimes include some parks and woodland areas. They do not necessarily intend to allow weeds or wildflowers to grow wild, so before picking things like dandelions in areas where you usually see local organized workers cutting, I would advise against picking here.

- **Harvest away from high-traffic areas, as car emissions can also pollute plants.** I have noticed a good amount of crab apples growing by roadsides, but these areas are always road-blocked with cars. The idea of the hazardous pollution in this area always puts me off the thought of harvesting here.

- **Harvest away from poisonous plants.** Avoid harvesting a plant when it is in close proximity to a poisonous plant.

- **Lastly, safety is key.** Whether you forage alone or with a friend, remember to be safe, know where you are, and be aware of your surroundings. If you plan to go somewhere wilder or off the grid, notify people of your whereabouts and plan accordingly.

CULTIVATING A HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE

A modern-day relationship with Nature can be enchanting because of the connection you can build, not only with the land around you but with yourself. The world we live in is so fast paced and busy that sometimes, when we pause, we often feel miserable or discontent, looking for something to fill the gap or just that moment. Instead of dreading those pauses, what if we could enjoy them? Or find a way to make it meaningful? Foraging and wildcrafting offer us ways to get in touch with the outdoors, but at the end of the day, it's really we who benefit from these practices, the more we make time for them.

It's so important as adults for us to pursue personally meaningful hobbies and carve out intentional time for ourselves, where we can simply *be* with ourselves. When you pass hedgerows or walk through a field, acknowledge the spirit of the plants, the forest, and Earth. Connect with your natural instincts, breathe in the essence of the world, let your eyes wander, and observe not just what you see, but how it makes you feel.

The term *rewilding* has different meanings in different contexts, but to me it means rediscovering our ancestral and primitive ties to Nature, and using natural resources for herbalism, arts, wildcrafting, and in giving back. In the next section of this book, you'll find not only foraging advice and different activities to try, but also traditions and rituals from around the world that honor our sacred connection to Nature—how magical and mysterious it is, how it provides for us and challenges us, and how we cannot live without it. Across different cultures, Nature is consistently viewed as a powerful living entity. You'll also find inspiration for creating your own traditions and rituals to infuse a bit of magic into your day-to-day

life, so that the next time a moment of reprieve from its bustle comes, you'll know what to do. Take a deep breath, step outside, and be enchanted by what the natural world has to offer.

Nature, as it cycles through its own seasons, can help us move through the different seasons of our lives, whether we're at the beginning of something—a new career, a new love—or the end, or somewhere in the middle. Just like the grass, trees, flowers, and fruit you're about to learn about, you, too, are constantly growing, constantly in motion, constantly beginning anew.

PART TWO

FORAGING BY SEASON

Each season bears different fruits and brings its own tidings. Each is a celebration of the passage of time, the cycle of life that is constantly in rotation. In this section, we will examine the magic of autumn, winter, spring, and summer—what we can find and forage and utilize depending on what time of the year we're in. You may decide to flick to your favorite season and begin there, or start with whatever season you're currently in. So, set the tone, pick a season, and let's get straight into it.

AUTUMN
AUTUMN FORAGING
BURDOCK
HAWTHORN
TEASEL
ELDBERRY
GOLDENROD

Autumn crosses between the late growing season and early dormant season for plants and vegetables. With autumn comes the falling of temperature and transition begins. Days are shorter. Delicate young shoots grow and fall back as the weather changes. Many leaves start to lose their green chlorophyll pigmentation, and turn into tones of yellow, brown, and red, until they eventually fall. Animals begin preparing for colder nights and scarcer times.

We can still find some greens during autumn, and even into winter, because not all herbaceous plants will be “resting.” Some plants are late-flowering, meaning that they bloom later in the year. Oxeye daisy, Saint-John’s-wort, campion, lemon balm, white clover, and mints, for example, may still be found despite the colder weather.

Our association with autumn can be seen as one of balance, the preparation of things during a transitional stage. We can feel this intuitively when we walk outside in the crisp, fresh cold that requires us to wear layers, and in the gorgeous fiery hues of leaves on trees, just before they fall. For me, autumn is a time to evaluate what we should let go of, or what we should preserve to bring balance to our lives. Transitions in Nature mirror our own transitions in life. Like animals in autumn, this can be a time for us to start preparing for change and what’s to come.

SEASONAL TIPS

- **Harvest roots.** Autumn is the perfect time for this, as roots are best harvested from after the first few frosts until when the ground is frozen. Cold temperatures signal a root to convert some of its complex starches to sugars, which act as energy and will help protect the root as it shifts its energy into the lower part of the plant. More information on specific roots to harvest, and what to do with them, appear in the pages that follow.

- **Check fruits, seeds, and nuts for holes.** This is to see whether another creature has gotten to the fruit before you. I once saw a worm in a mango, and now I can't eat a mango without the fear of seeing a wiggly friend. A worm isn't always something to freak out about; sometimes, as in the case of my mango, it means the fruit is good enough to eat (if you don't mind sharing it). In other cases, when the inside of the fruit does not look fresh and is mushy or discolored, then it may be too far gone to consume.

- **Preserve seeds.** Foraging isn't just about taking. It's also about giving back. Saving seeds you find for distribution later is a great way to give back to Nature and our planet, and to create more food and medicine sustainably for ourselves and animals.

- **Stock up for the winter.** Start preparing your herbal first-aid kit now to support you and your loved ones through the winter. You could purchase herbal remedies from a health food store, or you can make your own decoctions or herbal syrups (decoctions with an added sweetener) to boost immunity. Turn to here for basic instructions to create a decoction, and to here for herbal syrups. Be sure also to intake foods that are high in vitamin C, which can help fight against infection.

- **Preserve what you can.** Prepare for the colder months ahead by foraging ingredients for vinegars, jams, preserves, broths, and candied fruits, or

using what you already have to make these items that will keep well through winter. These processes of preservation have been used for centuries, before modern appliances, such as freezers, were invented. You can even do simple things, such as drying your herbs by tying them together with some twine and hanging them upside down in a dry, shady room with good air circulation.

POPULAR ITEMS TO FORAGE

ROOTS

Burdock root *(Arctium lappa)*. A digestive and blood tonic if there ever was one, this bitter medicinal root is in prime time to harvest. Burdock can be found growing across the globe from North America and Europe to northern Asia, while growing in meadows, riverbanks, and at the edge of woodlands. To a beginner, it may resemble a thistle. It is no wonder that in ancient magical practices, it was used for protection and to ward off unwanted energy. The flower head is rounded with purple thornlike flower tops (called burrs, which you might associate with Velcro, the way they stick to clothes when you brush by them). The root is black, and broad leaves grow at the base of the plant; it is cooked and eaten like a root vegetable or used for medicinal benefits, such as for rheumatism, killing germs, and treating fever symptoms. Make a tincture (see here) by infusing the chopped root in either alcohol, such as vodka, gin, brandy, or rum (minimum 50%), or vinegar; or dry and powder the roots to add to smoothies, as a supplement.

Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*). Comfrey can be found growing in Asia, Europe, and North America in the woodlands, hedgerows, areas of damp soils, riversides, and gardens from springtime to autumn, from full sun to shaded areas. You can identify comfrey by its broad leaves with deep veins and small hairs; comfrey has white, purple, or pink clustered, bell-like flowers. Their poisonous look-alike is foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*), whose leaves have slightly toothed edges in comparison to comfrey leaves, which are smoother on the edge. For more on the uses of comfrey, turn to here. Please note that the leaves and roots of this plant are toxic if taken internally.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) is a common plant usually brushed off as a “weed”’ as it grows pretty much everywhere around the world, in meadows, gardens, woodlands, and hedgerows. It shocks me the number of articles I see on how to get rid of or kill dandelions, just for the perfect lawn or garden design. Why kill something this valuable? All parts of a dandelion are useful, edible, and medicinal: flowers, leaves, and roots. The roots can be used not only as a coffee substitute but a medicinal tincture or tea for supporting liver functions. The ubiquitous, bright yellow flowers are best picked when the sun is out, an activity that’s best for spring or summer. Autumn is the optimal time to harvest the roots and leaves. When uprooting, dig gently around the base and slowly loosen the soil around the root and pull up by the leaves. The leaves can also be eaten or put in your compost pile, providing nutrients and nitrogen to the soil.

For a coffee substitute, dry the roots and leaves, then powder them in a coffee grinder. Use as you would ground coffee in a coffee filter, or boil and strain. Or make a decoction of the root to really release all the locked-up properties. With roots, a decoction is advised because roots need more time to infuse.

A **decoction** is the liquid that results from extracting the concentrated essence of a substance by boiling it. Generally this is a process that involves the hardy parts of an herb, root, or bark. Follow these instructions to create a basic decoction out of any substance: Collect your chosen herb, root, or bark. Cut everything into smaller sizes to fit in your pot, add water, and bring to a boil for 20 to 40 minutes. Strain and drink as strong tea.

If you're a beginner, watch out for another wildflower that dandelions are often confused with, called coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*), which historically was also used medicinally, for coughs and colds. Coltsfoot's flower head looks more like a daisy in comparison to dandelions, but at first glance, the two appear similar. The same can be said for cat's ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*), also known as flatweed. Luckily, it is nontoxic. Unlike dandelions, the fluffier-looking flower of cat's ear has more rectangular-shaped petals, fractally (irregularly) laid in a rounded shape.

To awaken your inner child, close your eyes and make a wish. Blow at the white dandelion puffball and watch your wish scatter to the wind. Imagine the wind carrying your wish, safe-keeping it through the season, until it's time for it to come true.

Horseradish (*Armoracia rusticiana*) is probably best known for its being a condiment. But the leaves can be eaten fresh or cooked, though the best use of them in this season will come from the roots. You can find this plant growing in grassy areas as well as roadsides, usually in the northern part of the US. The pungent, mustardy smell of horseradish leaves is useful in identifying this plant, as are the long glossy leaves that can grow up to 3 feet (92 cm) tall. The sharp flavor of the leaves and root is definitely one I think either you love or hate, similar to how people feel about wasabi, which is made almost completely from horseradish. I am not quite sure whether I really hate it yet, as I haven't tried it enough. I don't want to write it off completely. The roots are a potent medicine in decoctions or infusions, such as teas, and help with digestion. Ingesting horseradish is not advised for people with thyroid or inflammatory bowel disorders. To make your own horseradish condiment, shred the root in a food processor and mix with vinegar of a volume equal to about half that of the shreds, or to taste, and season with salt and pepper. Or chop the fresh roots into small pieces or sections and store for use another time.

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) is one of those sturdy plants you can find growing globally in North America and Europe all the way to some parts of Asia. It appears in gardens, woodlands, paths, hedgerows, and is mostly despised by some gardeners. Being classed as a weed can give a bad reputation, but this plant has multiple benefits from leaves and seeds to its root. The aerial parts are used externally and internally for medicine and food to boost iron and such vitamins as A and C, and it also works well for cord made from its plant fibers. You probably already have heard of this plant as stinging nettle, which gives away the main component. Nettles' pointy serrated leaves have small, fine hairs that cause this stinging sensation. These hairs can also be found along their stems. The seeds hang in clusters and are small and light yellowish-green. The plant can sometimes grow up to 6 feet (183 cm) tall when left undisturbed. Nettle root is edible and can also relieve urinary disorders. Read more about nettle in the crafts and activities section here.

Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) can be found across Europe, the US, and some parts of Asia. Teasels grow in so many places, such as meadows, woodlands, grasslands, and pathsides. You can spot it by its spiky, cone-shaped flower head and woody, spiky stem. The roots are harvested and used fresh or dried as a treatment for Lyme disease, muscle inflammation, and pain relief. You can make a tincture from teasel for internal use or add it to a cream and use it for an achy back or sore muscles. In Chinese medicine, teasel is known as a warming plant, affiliated with the kidney and liver meridians, due to its bitter property, which is believed to stimulate the digestive system and toxin removal. Some people also collect it as an ornament.

Make a Tincture

To make a tincture, fill your desired jar with chopped roots and submerge with alcohol (50%) or vinegar to cover. Leave in a dark place for 4 to 6 weeks to extract the benefits. Strain your tincture into a dropper bottle. Take drops throughout your day for maximum benefit. Seek out dosage information from an herbalist or herbal medicine books at the library.

Yellow dock (*Rumex crispus*) can be found natively through Europe and western Asia; however, it can also be found in the North America. It grows in abundance in fields, pathsides, meadows, woodlands, and hedgerows. It is a sturdy plant that can withstand damage from mowing or

extreme differences in temperature from full sun to wet conditions. Its long, lanceolate leaves can be found growing in a basal rosette shape and can also be identified by their wavy edges. The leaves also have a distinct white to lighter green vein from the petiole to the tip of the leaf. A notable identifying feature are the red seeds growing on a tall stem that can grow up to about 5 feet (153 cm) tall. The stem also has some ridges along them from top to bottom of the plant. When flowering in summer, dock provides small light green flowers that are oval with the single seed in the center. These also do not have any petals. Also known as curly dock, this is used as a diuretic and iron tonic, and as a medicinal tea for ear and throat infections and removing toxins. It has also been found that yellow dock root contains vitamins A, C, and E.

Tips for Harvesting and Storing Roots

- A small shovel can make the process easier, especially for longer roots, such as burdock.
- Think about where you are foraging. Is the area clean? Are any pollutants, herbicides, and pesticides possibly leached into the soil?
- Dig around the base of the plant to allow the root to be exposed easily without damaging it. Patience in this practice makes a big difference, especially dealing with roots.
- Harvesting when the soil is wet will make delicate roots easier to remove.
- Not all roots are suitable for culinary use, even if used for medicinal purposes, e.g., comfrey.
- Wash roots thoroughly, removing dirt, then air dry or use a dehydrator after chopping the roots into slices.
- When making a tincture with roots, make sure the roots are dry.
- Store roots in a dark, dry, cool place.

- Only harvest what you need. Roots are the optimum part of a plant, and overharvesting can be detrimental to the plant's life and ecology.

FOLIAGE AND FLOWERS

Goldenrod (*Solidago* spp.). These beautiful, woody plants with bright yellow flower clusters can be spotted from afar. They grow throughout Europe, South and North America, and in some parts of Asia. They can be found in hedgerows, edges of woods, and open areas, and are likely planted near houses as well. They can reach about 4 feet (122 cm) in height, their elliptical leaves with slightly toothed edges growing opposite each other up the stem; at the top is the fan of small yellow daisylike flowers—fitting, as this plant is in the daisy, or Asteraceae, family. The approximately one hundred species of *Solidago* look fairly similar, so once you see one, you will find it easy to recognize the others.

As a bonus, they are all as beneficial. You can use the leaves, flowers, and roots; for example, to create a poultice for sores and wounds, or in a decoction for coughs, sore throat, fever, and kidney problems, to help fight infections. You can differentiate this plant from its hay fever–causing look-

alike ragweed (*Ambrosia* spp.) that has smaller greener blooms with fernlike leaves, unlike goldenrods' striking bright yellow blooms.

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). This is a wonderful plant that survives past the summer. Yarrow's Latin name references Achilles, from Greek mythology; it was said that yarrow helped heal his wounds after the Trojan war. Yarrow can be found in Europe, North America, and Asia. You can find yarrow in various locations and throughout different seasons, on well-drained soils in full sun, such as meadows or gardens, perhaps even during mild wintertime conditions. You can identify the flowers by their clustered white, pink, or yellow petals. They have five petals, each on top of thin, feathery stems. The aerial parts are used for their astringent properties, and the lower plant not just for skin irritation and mild wounds, but also for its fever-reducing, diuretic, and antimicrobial properties. The leaves can also be used to stop bleeding and historically were said to be a treatment for soldiers' wounds. It can make a good addition to your bath; however, rarely yarrow can cause skin irritation, so be sure to check with a small patch test before attempting an immersion. This plant should not be ingested when pregnant.

CRAFTS AND ACTIVITIES

QUICK ROOT DECOCTION

We've talked a bit about roots and this recipe will show you a simple way to extract their medicinal benefits to use internally or externally. It produces a bittering and digestive stimulating mixture; however, feel free to add more berries or dried barks, such as willow (*Salix* spp.), for a pain-relieving tea, or slippery elm (*Ulmus rubra*) for a soothing acid reflux–reducing and digestive tea. Read more about bark and how to harvest it in the "Popular Items to Forage" section here of the Spring chapter.

Essentially, a decoction is like a strong tea, but due to the nature of the ingredients (roots, bark) you have to put some oomph into the infusion rather than letting it steep as you would a flower or leaf.

Ingredients:

3 tablespoons (30 g) dried berries of choice, such as hawthorn (optional)
1¾ ounces (50 g) dried burdock root
1¾ ounces (50 g) dried dandelion root
1⅔ cups (400 ml) water

Materials:

Medium-size pot
Strainer

Instructions:

Combine all the ingredients in your pot, including the water. Heat

until it starts to boil, then allow to simmer over medium heat for 20 minutes. For a stronger infusion, simmer for a few more minutes but top up the water, if needed. When finished, turn off the heat and let cool. You should be left with a consistency of a very strong tea.

Once cooled, strain and store in the fridge. Decoctions can be used as a tea, in syrup recipes, or for skin care.

PICK-ME-UP SYRUP

Syrups are a quick way to add a hint of botanical goodness to your tea, drinks, ice cream, or just take on their own as medicine. You can make a syrup for your taste and for whatever purpose you desire. This recipe combines the aromatic qualities of rose with the medicinal qualities of elderberries and sweet violets, to create a truly showstopping and comforting syrup to help boost your immune system and ward off common colds.

Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*). This is a wonderful berry to pick during this season, when they are dark red-purple. If they are green, then they are not ripe yet, so avoid picking in that stage. Elderberry can be found growing in Europe, North America, Australia, and some parts of North Africa. Notably in America, you can also find the species of elder called blue

elderberry (*Sambucus cerulea*) that, as its name suggests, has blue berries instead of the dark-colored berries of the *Sambucus nigra*. Look for elderberries growing around woodlands and the sides of paths and hedgerows. The berries are quite easy to identify but may be confused with (poisonous) dogwood (*Cornus* spp.) because of the similar berries and red tint on the stems. However, elderberry stems are redder, whereas dogwood stems blacker; elderberry leaves grow opposite each other, with small serrated edges, plus dogwood leaves grow singular on the branch and have deeper veins in the leaves and smooth edges. Elderberry is a pretty traditional staple to have in a homestead, as it has been scientifically proven to help fight against colds and ailments where an immunity boost is needed. No wonder, in ancient times, the elderberry symbolized good health and prosperity.

Rose (*Rosa* spp). Rose is used in such cuisines as Turkish, to add a floral flavor and scent to various dishes, including desserts. You can make a floral water from roses to use as a toner or refreshing spritz. Roses are traditionally a symbol of love. Infuse it into your syrup for fragrance, taste, and such medicinal benefits as antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties. What is not to love?

Sweet violet (*Viola odorata*). This beautiful and delicate flower, found in Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia, grows in shady areas or meadows, gardens, and woods. Violet is easily overpicked, so be aware to forage sustainably from different sites, or try adding it to your garden so

you have a personal supply. It has heart-shaped, deep green leaves and can be recognized by its bell-like purple flowers with a white center. These are pretty straightforward to identify as well as to forage: pick the flower tops off the stems. This plant is traditionally associated with the heart, because of its heart-shaped leaves and the notion that, in teas, the flowers could be used to treat heartache. Back in the day, their appearance was a characteristic for identifying the medicinal benefits of plants: heart-shaped equaled heart medicine. If you fancy adding a touch of ancient Rome to your home brew, or if something heavy is weighing on your heart, go ahead and add some violets. If you are allergic to roses, substitute with violets or remove from this recipe.

Ingredients:

2 cups (240 g) elderberries, washed
1 cup (97 g) chopped fresh ginger (optional)
Cinnamon sticks (optional)
4 cups (946 ml) water
2 cups (80 g) freshly picked unsprayed rose petals, washed, seeds removed
½ cup (170 g) honey or ½ cup (100 g) sugar
½ cup (20 g) fresh violet flowers (optional)

Materials:

Medium-size pot
Spoon
Medium-size sterilized jar or bottle
Strainer (optional)

Instructions:

Combine the elderberries, ginger, and cinnamon sticks in your pot and add the water. Let simmer, stirring once in a while, for about 1 hour, or until the elderberries are softened and water is reduced, adding the rose petals and violets at about the 50-minute point. If

you are using sugar, add now and stir until dissolved.

If you are using honey: Once the mixture is reduced, remove from the heat and let cool down, then add your honey.

Strain, if needed, and store your syrup in a sterilized jar or bottle. You can keep it in the fridge for a good 6 months. Use when feeling unwell: take a few tablespoons a day.

HAWTHORN KETCHUP

Hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.), also known as May tree, is known for its heart-centered medicinal properties. Hawthorn is a part of the large and wonderful Rosaceae (rose) family. There are many species of hawthorns, but the more common ones are the English *Crataegus laevigata* and the American *Crataegus monogyna*. Both can be used to make ketchup. You can find them growing in sunny spots, hedgerows, fields, and gardens. They are a sturdy and tolerable tree, and can survive in most climates, hence the large variety of species found across the world.

Their berries (haws) ripen in autumn, when they grow in a bunch together rather than in two connected stems (e.g., cherries). Some studies have looked into and identified their antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and B-flavonoid properties, which benefit the skin and overall health. They grow small, about ½ inch (1.3 cm) in size, and can range in color from yellow to red to deep red, with black on the bottom. They are best cooked to get the most flavor out of them. The potent leaves can be picked from spring to autumn and used fresh or dried for infusions. The leaves are quite distinctive, with deep lobes, serrated edges, and are palmated in shape. In spring, the hawthorn blooms and produces small white or light pink clustered flowers. They have five petals laid very tightly together, forming around a yellow carpel.

The leaves and berries have been clinically researched and are a proven remedy for strengthening the heart. Hawthorn berries have also been recognized for their ability to open up blood vessels to improve cardiovascular circulation. When you are feeling anxious and flustered, the leaves and flowers are helpful for relaxation. If you take medication for blood pressure or have any preexisting heart conditions, check with a medical professional before using any part of this plant.

Ingredients:

16 ounces (450 g) hawthorn berries (haws)

1 cup plus 2 teaspoons (250 ml) cider vinegar
1 cup plus 2 teaspoons (250 ml) water
⅔ cup (150 g) soft light brown sugar
1 teaspoon (1 to 2 g) dried culinary herbs of choice
Pinch of salt

Materials:

Sieve
2 large pots
Sterilized glass jar

Instructions:

Place the berries in a pot along with the vinegar and water. Bring to a boil and continue to boil until the skins split, approximately 30 minutes, Remove from the heat and mash the mixture through a sieve into a separate pot until all the fruit pulp is through and you are left with a thicker sauce. Add the sugar, dried herbs, and salt, and bring to a boil. Boil for 5 to 10 minutes. Remove from the heat, let cool, and bottle in a sterilized glass jar.

SPRAINS-AND-PAINS BALM AND POULTICE

Who doesn't have sprains and pains? I know I do even more ever since having my daughter. So, here is a recipe to make a balm to provide support in this area. This balm can be applied on bruises and areas such as the back. Do not apply on open wounds. Comfrey, mentioned earlier here, is key in this balm; it is foraged and grown precisely for its powerful ability to speed healing and slow inflammation of sprains, broken bones, and muscle injuries. It is also commonly known as "knit-bone," a name that matches its abilities. To get more scientific, it contains allantoin, the substance that helps the body to produce new skin cells.

Before you make this balm, use a traditional method of making a comfrey oil by leaving 5 ½ ounces (150 g) of fresh or dried comfrey in a jar with 1 cup plus 2 teaspoons (250 ml) of your chosen carrier oil (almond, grapeseed, sunflower, or hemp oil) to infuse in a dark place for 4 to 6 weeks. Alternatively, you can heat the comfrey and carrier oil mixture in a double boiler or in a bowl set over a pot of boiling water (in either case, don't let the boiling water touch the upper vessel) over low heat, for 2 to 4 hours. Strain and store your comfrey-infused oil in a dark bottle to make it last longer. Wash your pot or bowl and strainer *very* carefully after heating the mixture, as comfrey is toxic if taken internally… no traces should remain on your equipment.

What Are Carrier Oils?

Carrier oils are base oils that dilute a plant, such as comfrey, before they are applied to the skin. Carrier oils are necessary to ensure safe application, and their name comes from the fact that they "carry" essential nutrients into the skin. Examples include grapeseed, hemp, sunflower, jojoba, olive, and argan oil, to name a few. If you are looking for a thicker oil for treating dry skin, choose one like jojoba. Sunflower oil, commonly used in the kitchen, is one of the cheapest carrier oils used in skin products.

BALM

Ingredients:

3 cups (710 ml) comfrey oil (see here)

Rounded 1 ounce (30 g) soy wax or beeswax

A few drops of essential oil of choice, such as peppermint, lavender, or eucalyptus

Materials:

Large pot

Small jar

Instructions:

This one is a quick craft you can do and enjoy the benefits of. Pour your comfrey oil into a pot and add your wax, leave over low heat until the wax is melted and mixed in properly. Add your essential oil. Pour into your clean jar and store. Use when needed. Wash your pot very carefully after completing this activity, as comfrey is toxic if taken internally.

POULTICE

A poultice is an old-fashioned method of treating ailments, such as bruising, pains, and sprains. This entails a blend of ground-up herbs being combined for the best properties, depending on what is needed, such as comfrey for aching bones and muscles and yarrow for bleeding.

Ingredients:

Chopped comfrey cuttings or grated comfrey root
Water

Materials:

Blender or mortar and pestle
Gauze pads or cheesecloth
Piece of cloth
Bowl

Instructions:

Place your chopped comfrey in a bowl and add enough water to blend or mash to turn into a paste. Spread the paste inside the gauze, fold it up, then apply to the area of need. Or, if you don't mind, apply straight on skin (not on open wounds). Wrap with another cloth to secure the gauze in place. Leave on for a few hours; change when necessary. If you have any leftover paste, insert into the gauze, roll up, and put it into the freezer, in a resealable plastic bag, to have ready quickly when needed. Be sure to wash your bowl very carefully after this activity, as comfrey is toxic if taken internally.

TRADITIONAL FIRE CIDER

This is true folk medicinal tonic to fire up your body and systems to fight colds and flus. The popularity of this remedy can be credited to Rosemary Gladstar, a renowned figure in the herbalist community. When it comes to making this medicine, you can infuse a number of ingredients that each have their own medicinal benefits and, combined, really give your body the extra support to ward off any lingering colds.

The ingredients of this cider create a potent infusion full of anti-inflammatory, antiviral, antibacterial, and decongestant properties that have been said to promote not only physical but spiritual wellness. These ingredients include:

Four Thieves Vinegar, a vinegar, herb, spice, and garlic concoction famously used by thieves, including grave robbers, in the seventeenth century. As the legend goes, thieves doused themselves in this elixir to avoid catching the deathly plague while carrying on with their illicit activity. Once they were caught, a deal was made: in exchange for their secret, the thieves would be given a more efficient death—hanged rather than burned at the stake.

Onion and garlic are strong-smelling ingredients that were and still are used as deterrents that protect people from negative energy. Stories of old, such as onions being hung in homes during plague eras in England, show that these aromatics have long been thought of as a natural defense against sickness. In our household, when we are coming down with a cold, we place a few cut onions around the house. A central belief in European folklore is the idea that garlic could be used to repel evil in the form of devils and vampires. Garlic is a powerhouse plant with benefits ranging from supporting the body to fighting infections. It also has antibiotic properties and can help lower high blood pressure. Who is to say that sickness isn't a kind of evil, preying on your body?

Ingredients:

4 garlic cloves, crushed
1 cup (128 g) grated or (100 g) sliced fresh ginger
½ cup (128 g) grated or 100 g) sliced fresh turmeric

1 small chile, split in half
½ cup (120 g) grated or thinly sliced horseradish (if grating, do it outside or wear goggles)
½ onion
2 tablespoons (12 g) freshly ground black pepper
1 lemon, sliced
A few sprigs of thyme
A few sprigs of rosemary
2 cups (680 g) honey
Cider vinegar, as needed

Materials:

2-quart (2 L) sterilized rubber-sealed jar, such as Ball

Instructions:

After preparing the ingredients, place into the sterilized jar and cover with the honey and cider vinegar to top off.

Feel free to add any other herbal or vegetable additions for their benefits. This is the beauty of medicines like fire cider.

Take a tablespoon (about 30 ml total) a few times a day when feeling unwell or when you feel a cold coming on.

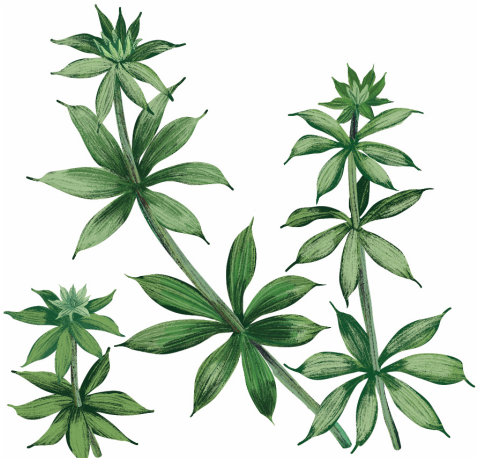
TONIC JUICE

Juicing has always been popular, and is another way to get the nutrients and contents from vegetables and fruits. If you are in need of a medicinal beverage, and also have a juicer or blender, this is a recipe for you. You can make some and bottle in any clean bottles you have around. Store in the fridge for about two days, depending on the contents. Give your body a boost of its nutrients and immune support in the morning, a beautiful way to

bless your body and provide your gut with what it needs. Creating a healthy environment in your gut has been scientifically proven to significantly improve your mental health.

The recipe for this juice is flexible. The ingredients are all suggestions and can be adjusted or replaced to meet your tastes and health needs. Add fruits and vegetables to the mixture for more flavor and sweetness. Experiment and have fun. If the juice doesn't come out as you want, try something different next time. Take notes while you experiment, to keep track of your progress until you've created a perfect, healthful blend.

You can incorporate foraged ingredients, such as:



Cleavers (*Galium aparine*), also known as goosegrass, sticky willy, and catchweed bedstraw. Classified as a weed due to its invasive and sturdy nature, what is disliked by some can actually be beneficial to others, medicinally and in food. Cleavers can be found in every continent from North America to Africa. You can find cleavers in hedgerows, meadows, gardens, and parks, where it can be identified easily by the fact that it sticks to your clothes. This makes cleavers a very good beginner plant to start foraging. Medicinally, it is used as a lymphatic and kidney tonic, often in the form of a cold overnight water infusion. You can use fresh cleavers in a poultice for skin irritation. Pick the top aerial parts of the plant and use dry or fresh. Because of the high water content of cleavers, the drying process could take some time. Harvest from springtime through to autumn.

Nettles (*Urtica* spp.). There are other types of nettles to forage, other than the most popular stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*). You may find purple dead-nettles (*Lamium purpureum*) or white dead-nettles (*Lamium album*). Unlike stinging nettle, these do not have the stinging hairs. They have the same serrated leaves growing on a square stem. Their flowers have an opening and droop like bluebells. As their name suggests, they can be found with white or purple petals.

Nettles can add extra iron, act as a diuretic, and are also rich in vitamin A—a very good addition to your juice. Harvest in spring to early autumn.

Ingredients:

Foraged ingredients of choice
Ginger
Honey
Orange
Lemon juice and/or zest
Chopped fresh turmeric
Mint Cleavers
Chiles or cayenne pepper, to improve metabolism of the body
Freshly ground black pepper, to help improve memory and gut bacteria
Warm water (optional), to stimulate the digestive system and help your body remove toxins
Natural sweetener

Materials:

Blender
Drinking glass
Bottle, if needed to store in fridge

Instructions:

Get in tune with your body. What do you need? How do you feel? Set your intention for this activity by writing it down. Take a moment to reflect on why you're doing this and what good it could bring to your life or even just to your day.

When you have identified this, choose which ingredients you think would suit you. Choose a variety, ideally a maximum of three or four ingredients, as you don't want to overpower the flavors by adding too many. Sometimes less is more when it comes to kitchen alchemy.

Blend your selected ingredients in whatever quantity you wish.

Adjust with a natural sweetener to taste.

Drink immediately from a glass or store, refrigerated, in a bottle.

TRADITIONS AND RITUALS

MIDAUTUMN FESTIVAL

Also known as the moon festival, this holiday takes place in either September or October, depending on where the full moon falls in the Chinese lunar calendar. Originating in China, the Midautumn Festival celebrates the season's harvest, and is a time when families gather to enjoy good food, fireworks, moon cakes, and one another's company. Lanterns representing good fortune are hung, beckoning the good fortune of next year's harvest.

The original celebration stems from the legend of Chang'e, the goddess of the moon, who was banished to the sky after accidentally drinking an elixir of immortality, separating her forever from her mortal lover. The full moon is therefore a symbol of unity, a time when loved ones are together at long last.

What people in your life have you been feeling separated from lately, whether by choice or happenstance? Take some time to look at the moon tonight. Is it full or crescent-shaped? How do you feel, staring at an object that is so bright yet so far away? The moon and its tides have much to teach us about the cyclical nature of our lives, how everything repeats and nothing stays the same. During festivals like Midautumn, observing the full moon can connect you to the moon's charging and healing energy. To me, the fullness of the moon symbolizes completion and energy. We are drawn to the moon, and in this we can learn to recognize the beauties of this life and our world. Cherish this autumn and what it brings. Hold your loved ones close. Find ways to reconnect, even if it's just with yourself.

HOMOWO

Homowo is a Ghanaian festival that celebrates the end of famine and the return of crops. It is celebrated in either August or September, at the start of Ghana's rainy season. This festival originated from and is still celebrated by the Ga people of Ghana today. It takes place in Accra, the capital of Ghana, and is a period that starts with retreat and quiet, a time when noise is banned, then proceeds to raucous celebration. Maize and yam are considered sacred foods during Homowo, honored for their presence throughout history as foods that helped families survive. The second half of the festival commences with a parade, where you'll find people dancing, singing, and walking through the streets, led by leaders of small districts or families. Traditional attire is worn, usually red or white, with face painting and herbs that symbolize cleansing. Libations are made for the old gods, and traditional dances take place, such as *kpanlogo* (pronounced "panlogo"), which entails moving to quick, high-energy drumbeats. This festival is all about celebrating the return of produce, the return of abundance at the end of a fallow season.

What abundance are you grateful for in your life? Abundance can be defined in many ways, depending on what riches in life you most value—money, friends, accolades, or something else. A strong body is also abundance, abundance in health, something we too often take for granted. Take stock of what you have, and nourish yourself, physically and spiritually, for the future. Try the Tonic Juice (here) to give yourself a nourishing boost during this season.

DIWALI

This festival of lights takes place during the Hindu new year, between October and November. The exact date shifts each year, depending on the lunar calendar. A celebration of light over darkness, of righteousness over evil, lights in the form of candles and *diyas* (small oil lamps) are lit for five days as a ritual in family homes. Flowers are hung across doorways, and women break out their most gorgeous saris for the occasion. This festival is

observed by Sikh, Buddhist, and Hindu people alike, different religious groups that have nuanced beliefs around why and for whom they are celebrating. Fireworks go off as gifts and food are exchanged. Everywhere you look, lights are shining.

How can you bring this concept of light over darkness into your home? Light symbolizes life, goodness, and purity. Light a candle and take a moment to breathe. No matter what hardship you are going through, there is always room for good things to enter. Be like a tree and embrace the changes during this season, and remember that rest will allow you to be the best version of yourself in seasons to come. For instructions to make your own candle, turn to here.

WINTER

Winter is one of my favorite times of the year, a time when you can make warm drinks, wrap up cozily, and snuggle with the ones you love.

This part of the year typically brings the darkest nights and coldest days. Nature turns inward: Animals have stocked up on food, plants, rest, and let go of the old and the dying while preparing to blossom. Trees shed their leaves. Their root systems are hard at work, storing and conserving the trees' energy, nutrients, and water in preparation for spring.

The departure of light and general slowing-down of flora and fauna are part of what make winter so enchanting. Like animals and plants, we, too, require rest. We could learn a lot from Nature about how to lean into this part of our biology, which is inherent in us but often ignored due to the demands of modern life.

The activities in this chapter are all geared toward rest, relaxation, and reflection. As temperatures drop and animals retreat to their homes, the world becomes quieter, less busy. The goal in winter should not be to fill this quiet; rather, to embrace it as a gift, one that can lead us to a quieter mind. Reflection isn't always easy, but almost always it is necessary. That way, when spring does come, you'll be able to approach it with renewed vigor and vitality.

SEASONAL TIPS

- **Do not overpick.** Winter is a time of rest and conservation for Earth, and we must respect that by not overpicking. Wild food and resources are not only for humans but for animals, too, not to mention entire ecosystems. Especially during winter, wild food sustains animals as surplus. When harvesting, never pick all of the supply that you see. Always leave some so that more can grow.

- **Wear layers.** Layers are always a good idea, since temperatures can fluctuate depending on time of day. You may feel cold when you first step outside, but after walking around and exerting yourself physically, you could start to feel hot. Check the temperature before you leave the house.

- **Hydrate regularly.** Hydration is key, especially in the winter when we tend to get dry. Keeping hydrated can also help us power through our adventure as we lose some of our body water content through sweating. You also never know when you might need it for a first-aid situation.

- **Preparation.** Before you leave, charge your phone and take along a portable charger and a medical kit.

- **Keep to clear spots.** If you are foraging in a wilder area or an area that is covered in snow or ice, pay close attention to your surroundings. Avoid potential accidents by keeping to clear spots where the ground is even. Wear proper shoes and heed signs about safety if any are around. Keep your phone with you and notify someone of your whereabouts and plans for the day. This is to make them aware of when you expect to be back and whether they should become concerned.

POPULAR ITEMS TO FORAGE

BERRIES

Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*) is a berry you are likely very familiar with, which grows in Europe and North America. Blackberry bushes are likely to be found at the edge of the woods, hedgerows, or in any untamed area where plants appear. They are also known as bramble bushes. Blackberries are sold in many grocery stores year-round; they are also a great beginner berry to forage, as they have no poisonous twins, meaning you can forage without fear. Blackberries are great for pies, ice cream (if you're brave enough to eat ice cream during winter!), and smoothies, or enjoyed on their own as a snack. When foraging, pick berries that have a deep black color. Leave red blackberries alone, as they are not yet ripe and will not ripen off the stem. Eat raw as a snack or add to a salad.

Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) is a popular berry known for its presence in gin. It is the only berry in this discussion that is not part of the Rosaceae (rose) family. It is an evergreen that can be found growing across

Europe, the US, and Asia. You can identify juniper by the bunches of dark blue berries and pointy-looking small leaves on its branch. Pick berries to dry or eat fresh as a snack or in salad. Commonly used in drinks for its woody and subtly spicy flavor, juniper is also used medicinally, as it is high in vitamin C, flavonoid, and antioxidant content.

Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) is a popular, ancient tree also known as mountain ash. It is often found in Europe, Asia, the US, and New Zealand, in gardens, parks, and residential areas. For example, as I'm writing this, I can see two trees when I look outside my window! You can also find them growing along roadsides, pathways, and other areas with rocky soil. These days, the berries are commonly used in jelly or jam recipes. Please note that rowan berries should not be eaten raw, unless you want a stomachache. The berries are red-orange in color, with blue-green leaves that are pinnate in shape. The flowers are small and white with five petals. The flowers look quite similar to those of other plants, such as hawthorn or blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), so for beginners, I would recommend using the leaves to finalize your identification. Turn to here for a jam recipe.

NUTS AND SEEDS

Acorns grow on oak trees (*Quercus*), which commonly grow around Europe and North America. When it comes to identifying them, acorns are

pretty beginner-friendly as you can identify the oak tree by its wide and roundly lobed leaves. I also think acorns (which are indeed nuts) look like nuts that are wearing really small but funky knitted hats. They are an important food for animals, such as squirrels and mice, especially during the winter when acorns become one of their main food sources, so really only take what you need. For human consumption, acorns may be roasted, cooked for specific dishes, or ground into flour. Prepare acorns before you eat them by putting them in warm water to remove their tannins, a compound that can cause an upset stomach. The water will turn brown. Repeat the process until the water is clear, as this shows that all tannins have been removed.

Beech (*Fagus* spp.) trees are deciduous trees that grow wild around Europe and North America. These trees are very common throughout woodlands and can be recognized quickly by their dark green leaves with deep parallel veins. The bark is also identifiable because of its gray color. They produce nutritional nuts inside spiked seed pods, and are sometimes collected as survival food as they are high in fats and protein. Recipes for baked goods using beech flour can be found online. To harvest, wait until the seed pods have opened; this is when the nuts are ripe. Some of the seed pods may have already fallen off the tree by then. Further open the pod by peeling back the four parts and remove the nut from its shell, keeping in mind some pods will be empty. Harvested nuts can be eaten fresh, roasted, or cooked. Historically, beech nuts have been ground into flour and used in baking.

Dock seeds grow on the perennial plant yellow dock or curly dock (*Rumex crispus*) and broad-leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*), so you'll be sure to see these seeds reappearing in the same place year after year. Dock synthesizes iron in soils, which is why the seeds and leaves are used for their iron content. Luckily, the seeds tend to be found year-round and the plant grows just about everywhere, in hedges, fields, and woods of Europe, western Asia, and North America. To identify, look for a tall stem (sometimes up to 5 feet [1.5 m]) packed with red seeds, and long leaves at the base that have curled edges. Harvest by brushing the seeds off the stem and then drying them. This plant is related to buckwheat (*Fagopyrum* spp.), so you might not be surprised that its seeds are commonly ground to make a flour that's high in fiber, B vitamins, vitamin C, and iron. To prepare the seeds for baking, pass them through a sieve before roasting them. Alternatively, you can include the husk and inner seed if you don't mind the extra fiber. Roast the seeds for 6 to 7 minutes at 320°F (160°C), then process them into a smooth flour and use as you would any other flour. (I would try adding a small amount of dock seeds to a cracker or bread recipe first, see whether you like their slightly bitter flavor.) Label and store in an airtight jar.

Sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) is a staple in autumn and winter, well known for being enjoyed roasted. We all know how the winter classic goes: “Chestnuts roasting on an open fire…” The sweet chestnut tree is in the same family as the beech family and can be widely found growing across the planet, in parks, woodland edges, or fields. Its common uses include being roasted, candied, boiled, or added to any dish for extra vitamin C and fiber. A good way to identify them is by their leaves, which are long and toothed, not to be confused with the toxic horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) leaves, which are fanlike. Sweet chestnuts are protected by a round, spiky seed pod, making them easily recognizable. Harvest them when the pods are open or start to drop off the tree. Remove the seed pods (some people recommend soaking in water beforehand to soften them) to reveal the nut inside. When picking, discard any soft seed pods (likely rotten) or ones with holes (insects got to the food already).

FRUITS

Crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*) trees are and provide wild apples. Crab apples, which I’m sure you’ve heard of, commonly grow by roadsides, riverbanks, and woods. Crab apples look like a smaller version (about 1¼ inches [3 cm] in diameter) of the cultivated apple. Their leaves are oval shaped, glossy with small serrated edges. Pick the crab apples and enjoy raw or cooked; use in a jam or in any baking recipe that calls for apples. You could even make your own cider vinegar from them. Avoid eating the seeds, however, as their hydrogen cyanide content could give you a bad stomachache or headache. Turn to here for a jam recipe.

Rose hips (*Rosa* spp.) are the fruits of rosebushes. They are an edible winter delight, high in vitamin C and antioxidants in addition to being a tasty treat. You tend to find them from late summer when ripened through to the first frost, when they are sweeter and softer. Rose hips can be found throughout Asia, Europe, Australia, and North and South America. You can find these in garden edges, woodlands, trails, and parks. They can be easily recognized by their bulblike shape and bright orange-red color; they also have small thin strips, or hairs, underneath the bulb. If you are in doubt whether you are looking at rose hips, check the branches for thorns, which will help identify them correctly as part of the Rosaceae family.

When preparing rose hips, make sure to remove the hairs and seeds inside by cutting the hips in half and scooping them out with a spoon. This is probably the most time-consuming part, but try to make it fun. Play music, grab a drink, and create an atmosphere for creativity. Once the hairs and seeds have been removed, use the hips in syrups, teas, or jam, or let them dry and store for later use.

FOLIAGE

Hairy bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*) is a hardy green that grows in grasslands and also in bare soil (areas of land not covered in grass). Hairy bittercress can be found in Asia, Europe, and North America. As a matter of fact, you may find it year-round, depending on where you live. It is commonly used for culinary purposes, prized for its peppery and light mustard taste (it is part of the Brassicaceae [mustard] family). You can identify hairy bittercress by its low-to-the-ground leaves that grow in a circular arrangement (called a rosette). The leaves grow on both sides of the stem (pinnately) and are larger toward the top. It is easy to remove the leaves with scissors or by hand when pulled from the base. Add these raw to your next salad for some peppery flavor, or any dish that calls for a leafy green.

Three-cornered leeks (*Allium triquetrum*) are greens you can spot in

woodlands, hedgerows, and gardens across New Zealand, Australia, Europe, and North and South America around this time of the year. They are quite invasive, so don’t be surprised if you find some growing in your own garden. Three-cornered leeks are onionlike in flavor and share the same genus as onions, regular leeks, and garlic. They have bluebell-like flowers and long, thin green leaves that can be eaten cooked or raw. They have a distinct ridge along the back of the leaf, which helps in identifying them. Avoid uprooting the bulb unless you’re harvesting from your own garden. By your snipping only the leaves, the plant can grow back. Toss in a salad as you would any herb, or grind into a pesto. Use in any dish where you would normally use onions.

CRAFTS AND ACTIVITIES

FESTIVE WREATH

Wreaths are festive decorations this time of year, adding cheer and warmth to any space, making it feel more homelike. Instead of purchasing a wreath this year, make one from foraged items. Step outside and collect your own materials.

For the base: To give your wreath structure, try foraging for branches, vines, or long foliage that have some bend in them. Examples: common ivy (avoid if allergic), holly, laurel, and rowan, and evergreen trees, such as yew, fir, spruce, and cedar.

For decoration: You can collect natural adornments, such as pinecones, flowers, fresh or dried, berries, seed pods, and other plants, or incorporate things you already have at home.

If you have pets, check online or with your veterinarian that the greenery and decorations you choose (such as holly or yew, which are toxic) will not harm them if nibbled.

Use the following plants to enhance your wreath with additional meaning:

HERB-ROBERT AND CLOVERS FOR GOOD LUCK

Herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum*) is commonly found in Britain and North America, growing in gardens, disturbed ground, woodlands, and mostly in areas with well-drained soils. It has distinctive, tiny (about $^{3}/8$-inch [1 cm]) reddish purple flowers, which have five petals with pink-white in the center. You will also notice some pink-white lines on the petals.

The stems can be easily recognized due to their red coloring; there are usually to three or five leaves flat and palmately lobed leaves on a head. An interesting use for this herb is as an insect repellent, maybe because of its strong smell.

Disturbed ground means the ground that has been excavated, uprooted, planted in, or had any work or natural event occur that changes the natural form.

Red (*Trifolium pratense*) or white (*Trifolium repens*) clovers are commonly found in North Africa, Europe, and both North and South America. So, you can see they distribute well. They grow in meadows and people's gardens, and are recognizable by their distinctive three leaves on an individual stem. You may also notice a distinct white V marking on each leaf that helps distinguish the plant. Flower heads are either pink-red or white. If you find a four- or five-leaf clover, according to English legend, you will either see fairies or become rich.

Extra Facts About Clover

Clover flowers can also be used in teas to stimulate

production of saliva, which helps with digestion and soothes during menstruation and menopause. This is due to the phytoestrogens in clover, which act as estrogen in your body when ingested. This is a go-to flower for menstrual pains and also helps balance hormones.

HERB BENNET AND MUGWORT, FOR PROTECTION

Herb Bennet, also known as wood avens (*Geum urbanum*), can be found growing in Europe, North America, and western Asia in gardens as a weed and in hedgerows, woodlands, and anywhere shady. You will likely see a rosette of leaves, with each stem holding three-lobed leaves similar to the leaves of a strawberry. Underneath these larger leaves, you may also see younger three-lobed leaves growing on the same stem. When they flower in spring and summer, they have delicate five-petaled yellow flowers. In the past, this plant was linked to the Holy Trinity because of its trefoil leaves (leaves divided into three leaflets). As such, it was believed that this plant could protect whoever carried it and also create a safe space.

Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) grows in Europe, Asia, and North America in woodlands, gardens, and along river banks from autumn to early winter. Noticeable features include their small pinnate leaves, sage scent, velvetlike feel when touched, and the distinct silvery underside of each leaf. When the small, rounded flower buds are out between spring and autumn, crush a few between your fingers and enjoy the most amazing sagelike aroma. You may also find another variety of mugwort native to America, *Artemisia douglasiana*. Those leaves are much longer and larger in comparison and may have four lobes near the tips of a few leaves. Read more about mugwort here.

FLOWERS, FOR GOOD VIBES

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), also known as pot marigold, for cheer. A good beginner flower to identify and even grow, calendula flowers are large and easily recognizable by their vibrant orange color. The flowers grow on a single stem. They are perennial and hardy, and can withstand the perils of a beginner green thumb. You can find wild calendula growing natively in southern parts of Asia, Europe, and also now introduced to North America. They are likely found in meadows and basins, or you can purchase dried calendula at your local health food store.

Marigolds have traditionally been associated with the sun and with positive energy. Add these to your wreath if you're feeling low and in need of a spiritual pick-me-up.

Rose (*Rosa* spp.) for love: The rose is a symbol of love because of its connection with Venus, the goddess of love and beauty. Turn to here for more on roses.

HOW TO MAKE A WREATH

Materials:

Selection of foliage and flowers for base

Additional elements, such as pinecones or berries, for decoration
Twine or florist wire
Scissors

Instructions:

Choose long pieces of foliage for the base, and secure and twist them around one another with twine or florist wire to secure.

Twist the length of foliage around to create a circular bunch. When you have a good secure base for the wreath, move on to decorating and pretty much freestyling a design that you like. You can fan out the branches and flowers or pack them tightly into the wreath. It is up to you; you have free rein.

Decorate by securing pinecones or berries to the front of the wreath, or pushing stems of your chosen flowers into the wreath.

You can also make smaller bunches of foliage to secure onto the base.

Be adventurous, colorful, dark, simple, complex, whatever you feel. Be present as you wildcraft and just flow with it. Think about what you would like to welcome into the new year. What would you like your wreath to represent? Hold on to this intention as you create.

EASY JAM

Here is a simple jam recipe to make with a fruit of your choice; for example, crab apples, rose hips, or berries.

Ingredients:

Generous 1½ pounds (700 g) of whatever fruit, etc., that you're using
1½ cups (300 g) superfine sugar
2 tablespoons (15 ml) freshly squeezed lemon juice

Materials:

Large saucepan
Small knife
Teaspoon
Fine sieve set over a bowl
Pint-size (500 ml) sterilized jar with a rubber seal, such as Ball

Instructions:

Wash your fruit. Using a small knife, remove any stems and seeds.

Use a teaspoon to crush the fruits through a fine sieve into a bowl to create more of a sauce texture before boiling. Combine the fruits, sugar, and lemon juice in a medium-size saucepan pan and bring to a boil over medium heat. Boil, stirring once in a while, for 30 minutes, or until mushy and the sugar has melted. Pour the mixture into a sterilized jar and date and seal. Let cool and then store in the fridge.

REVIVAL BATH SOAK

What better time than now to enjoy a relaxing soak to warm your bones and soothe your end-of-year aches and pains. We could all do with a moment to unwind and enjoy the magic and healing that herbals offer. Pretty much what I am advising is: lie in a big tub of lukewarm herbal tea. The relaxing and skin-soothing benefits will do you good.

You can tie the ingredients into a cheesecloth bag, and either tie and place that in your bath or hang it on from the tap to infuse while the water is running.

Calendula is a wonderful flower we talked about briefly here. It is a powerhouse in beauty and skin care. You've probably seen it in a lot of products, especially for sensitive skin. This is because calendula is antifungal, antibacterial, high in antioxidants, and has the ability to reduce irritation. I personally use this in an oil infusion for my daughter's skin. A handful of these flowers are a great addition to a bath.

English daisy (*Bellis perennis*) is a commonly found wildflower, historically known as bruisewort for its ability to help heal bruises and brighten dark spots or hyperpigmentation. This is because compounds in the flower, called polyphenols, block the overproduction of melanin that causes hyperpigmentation.

Oat straw (*Avena sativa*) Oat straw is part of the Poaceae, or grass, family. It grows wild in fields, gardens, and meadows. The milky sap in oat has a soothing effect on skin. You can also replace with oats from the grocery store.

Pine and spruce needles can be added to bring in a woody aroma to the bath. Why not bring the essence of the outdoors inside? Spruce (*Picea* spp.) and pine (*Pinus* spp.) are two of my favorite trees, and I am sure you are aware of them. These conifer trees are commonly known for their outdoorsy fragrance and use in household products, and can be found in woodlands and mountainous areas. They can withstand extreme weather, which is reflective of why you can find them across the globe, in Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia. Note that spruce and pine can be easily confused for each other; a good way to distinguish between them is that pine needles tend to be longer and grow in clusters from a single point from a branch. If the needles are shorter and growing individually around a branch, then that may be a spruce or fir tree. You can easily identify a fir tree because the needles have lighter green and white undersides.

Although internally they are a source of vitamin A and especially vitamin C, when used externally, this can be good if you are feeling poorly with flu symptoms. Using them in a bath can also provide antimicrobial properties for the skin. Vitamin C is superbeneficial, especially in fighting cold and flus, boosting immunity, and protecting from infections. Some pine syrup or tea could do the trick in booting those flu symptoms good-bye, but be extra careful about sourcing only the edible kind.

It is important to remember that some species of pine and spruce are not advised for consumption and can be toxic to animals and maybe humans; for instance, Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), which grows mostly in the western US. This variety has a more burnt orange textured bark with black markings and oval-shaped cones. The long needles grow three in a bunch.

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) may be found in mild winter conditions. Read more about yarrow here.

Ingredients

Foraged ingredients of choice
Rock salt or Epsom salts
Dried orange slices

Materials:

Cheesecloth

Instructions:

Place a generous amount of your chosen flowers and plants into your cheesecloth, along with the rock salt and dried orange and tie the ends together.

You can place the bag to soak in your bath. Alternatively, you can hang it on your tap to infuse when the tap water is running into your tub.

Bath Journaling

Take a journal with you to your bath, and while you're soaking, write down anything that comes to mind, any idea or thought you wish to explore. Maybe you'd like to reflect on your day, or maybe you'd like to write about a happy memory. Maybe there's something that's been bothering you, and you want to understand why. Writing things down is a great practice in mindfulness, in being still with your thoughts. Letting them in, then letting them go.

Bath Meditation

I don't know about you, but sometimes when I have a bath or just a moment of stillness, my mind runs immediately toward my anxieties, stresses, and deepest inner thoughts. I've found that including journaling or a meditation during this quiet time can turn a racing mind into one that is positive, clear, and energized.

We can connect to ourselves here.

Play some relaxing music before you get in the bath. I personally like music with Tibetan singing bowls, as I find it very soothing. Find what music helps put you at ease.

Close your eyes as you lie in the water.

Close your eyes and look just above your eyes, into the dark.

You may start to see colors and certain shapes (probably due to the way the light in the bathroom is passing through your eyelids).

Imagine yourself in a beautiful and peaceful garden. Inhale through your nose and fully relax your body with an exhale through your mouth. Your mind should follow. Imagine a river flowing, colorful flowers, birds singing, anything you

think would exist in your ideal sanctuary. Breathe in peace and breathe out forgiveness and freedom from holds such as anxiety. Let the water hold you. Imagine what you need, and then imagine that you have it. How do you feel, seeing yourself fulfilled? Visualize water droplets, then visualize them falling like rain into the river of your sanctuary. Focus on droplets hitting the water.
Stay here for a moment and allow this visualization to manifest real calm. When you are ready, open your eyes slowly.

FOREST CANDLES

We can bring the sense of Nature into our home in any season, but during winter, this can be particularly special due to the selection of what you will find as plants shed the old to prepare for the new.

In places of sanctuary, candles are used to bring light to a certain thought, mood, memory, or intention. We can bring that same concept to our home and our personal spiritual practices. When we create this candle, we are creating a magical experience ready for when needed.

Ingredients:

2 cups (260 g) soy wax, beeswax, or paraffin
Dried pressed wildflowers, such as English daisies (here) or

calendula (here)
Small leaves and winter greens; e.g., pine needles (see here)

Materials:

Large saucepan
Heatproof glass measuring cup large enough to hold the wax
Cotton wicks; alternatively, if you have any cotton twine, you can cut a length longer than the jar and dip into a small layer of wax that you have poured into the jar. Let this dry and then continue to fill the jar with wax as the recipe requires. Be sure to use cotton, not synthetic twine.
Smaller, narrow glass to fit inside the other jar, with some room around
Larger glass jar, large enough to fit the smaller jar inside—any old jar you have lying around will do
Wooden clothespin or skewer

Instructions:

Heat some water in a saucepan. Place your glass measuring cup inside the pan and fill with your wax.

Slowly melt your wax over medium heat.

Place a wick in the center of the small jar; fasten in place by wrapping around a skewer or clipping on a clothespin to keep the wick straight. Pour in your melted wax and set aside in a cold place to cool.

When cooled, place the jar into the slightly larger jar and place flowers and small leaves inside, between the jars. Melt some more wax and pour into the gap between the jars to cover and suspend the flowers and leaves. Set aside to cool and remove the skewer or clothespin.

Gentle Candle Meditation

This meditation is inspired by an ancient yoga practice called Trataka.

After you light your candle, sit somewhere comfortable and embrace the light. Focus on the gentle flicker and dance of the flame. Set a timer and proceed to watch for five to ten minutes, simply focusing on the flame. When a stressful thought comes to mind, acknowledge it, then let it pass. Envision the flame bringing joy and light to you. When the time is up, close your eyes for a few moments. Set an intention to visualize this flame the next time you encounter an obstacle. Let the light guide you through.

BITTERS OXYMEL

Oxymel comes from the Greek *oxy* (acid) and *meli* (honey). Making a bitters infusion can be a simple process. Although quick on the front end, the entire process takes weeks to infuse. This is where the magic happens with

extraction of the beneficial components of whatever substance you're using.

In herbal medicine, bitters are used to support the digestive system. Bitters stimulate taste buds and send a signal to your body to create more saliva, which produces enzymes needed to break down foods. In this recipe, we will make a potent digestive aid using well-known and accessible roots and herbs that you should find no matter where you are. When feeling sluggish or after a meal, have a teaspoon (5 ml) to support your digestive system.

Citrus (*Citrus* spp.) peel. In Chinese medicine, orange peels are a bittering agent and aromatic, used for stimulating digestion.

Dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale*). Please refer to here for more about dandelions.

Fennel seed (*Foeniculum vulgare dolce*). Aromatics, such as fennel seeds, are suggested as a supplement to soothe upset stomachs and colicky babies.

Ginger (*Zingiber* spp.). This popular herbal remedy has numerous benefits and can help ward off illness during cold and flu season. This is due to its components, such as gingerol, making it an anti-inflammatory, a potent medicine for nausea and also indigestion.

Ingredients:

2 cups (or to fill a large liquid measuring cup to the 475 ml mark) of whatever combination of herbals you like, including the above and horseradish (here) and nettle (see here)

2 cups (680 g) honey

2 cups (475 ml) cider vinegar

Materials:

1-quart (1 L) sterilized jar with a nonmetal lid, or plastic wrap and parchment paper to cover

Sieve

Instructions:

Prepare the herbal ingredients by cutting any big pieces into smaller-size chunks.

Place in your sterilized jar and fill with your herbal ingredients, then add the honey and cider vinegar. Label and store in a cool, dark place for 4 to 6 weeks to infuse. When ready, sieve the mixture and label, then store in the fridge for up to 6 months.

TRADITIONS AND RITUALS

IGNAT DAY

The Dacian people, ancient ancestors of Romanians, lived around the Carpathian Mountains in 80 BCE. Every December 20, people prepared cattle and pigs for the traditional feasts that would take place during Christmas. Theatrical dances with bear and stag masks were performed in a ritual honoring the death and rebirth of the year. The animals symbolized triumph over a harsh winter.

What deaths and rebirths can you honor in your own life? What have you let go this past year? What new things can you let in? When we look to Nature during this season, we are reminded that death is part of life. Endings are also beginnings.

ST. LUCIA'S DAY

St. Lucia's Day is an important holiday in parts of Scandinavia, and has roots in pagan and Christian traditions. Every year on December 13, this festival of lights ushers in the Christmas season by bringing light to what is literally the darkest time of the year, and by honoring St. Lucia, a Christian martyr who was persecuted for her religious beliefs. Today, the holiday features girls in white, bearing candles and singing songs to this saint. Other rituals include eating traditional food, such as *lussekatter* (saffron buns), bringing greenery into the home, and gift-giving.

Bring light to your own home during the dark winter months by lighting a candle and eating something comforting that's in season, such as roasted chestnuts. Follow the instructions for the candle meditation here, or journal

by candlelight (here) as you reflect on what it means to “bring light” to something. How do you define darkness? How do you define light? What are you trying to see?

ŌMISOKA

The last day of the year marks an important time for celebration in Japan, called Ōmisoka. The rituals of this festival are meant to honor the closing of a chapter, and to offer resolution for any bad things that happened in the past year. Ōsoji, for example, is a house-cleaning ritual that is meant to drive bad luck out of the house. Nearing midnight, bells of Buddhist temples ring to represent the removal of Bonnou or (earthly desires), which keep humankind from reaching enlightenment. Gift-giving and gathering with family and friends are parts of the Ōmisoka tradition. Eating noodles during this time symbolizes the crossing over from old to new and is a wish for a long life, long like a noodle.

If your energy lately has been low, try cleaning your space. Imagine that the cleaning will not only improve your physical space but will offer a spiritual cleanse as well. To get rid of any lingering bad vibes, burn a little sage for extra protection and a calming scent.

SPRING

The word that comes to mind for me when I think of spring is *bloom*. Everywhere, flowers are blooming, and Mother Nature shows off with bursts of different colors. Trees bear flowers, enticing creatures from caterpillars to squirrels to come out of hiding. Hibernating animals wake up rested and ready to explore. The extra sunlight during this season gives plants the energy they need to grow. Insects and other pollinators are energized and ready to seek out flowers.

Much of the enchanted imagery from fairy tales is inspired by this season. The beauty and abundance of spring can't be overstated; something about it just *feels* magical, the way that the cycle of life begins again after a long winter.

Foraging during spring can bring us so much joy in discovering, or rediscovering, the world's richness. There is a shift in the atmosphere, as the energy that was conserved during winter is put toward renewal. How about we take this feeling and energy into our life?

Flower Pigmentation

The colors in flowers are formed by pigments in Nature, such as anthocyanins, producing red and blue; carotenoids, yellows and oranges; betalains, colors from red to yellows; and chlorophyll, greens.

SEASONAL TIPS

- **Again, do not overpick.** Spring is a time when Nature blooms, so we have to remember that it is also an important shift in ecosystems, and insects, other pollinators, and animals also need these important sources of food, nutrients, and energy. Pollinators need to be able to snack on nectar for energy as they work; caterpillars feast on leaves to be able to develop. Sharing is caring, as the popular phrase goes.

- **Take notes.** Now is a great time to take notes, especially as a beginner. To learn to identify plants at their full bloom during spring and summer time will give you more confidence in your journey.

- **Pick younger leaves.** For such plants as nettles or other edible greens, pick the younger leaves, as those will taste much fresher. Forage from mature trees, leaving young trees to continue growing.

- **Say good-bye to bugs.** After harvesting, place flowers on a tray or baking sheet to allow any insects time to crawl out. I have unfortunately drowned a few bugs while making seasonal drinks.

- **Sow seeds.** Plant the seeds that you have collected and saved from earlier seasons. Calendula is a pretty easy one to start with if you're new to gardening. If you do not have a garden, you can share your seeds with someone who does, or grow certain plants indoors if you have a place that gets sufficient light. Good indoor plants include rosemary, mint, sage, and lavender. Or look out for a local seed swap—you can donate what you won't sow and gain a variety of seeds.

POPULAR ITEMS TO FORAGE

FOLIAGE AND FLOWERS

Cowslips (*Primula veris*) are dainty flowers found in fields and gardens. They are found in Europe, western Asia, and North America. Foraged in spring and summer, they are traditionally used for respiratory ailments or sore throat, to reduce swelling, and as a minor sedative and expectorant (to treat coughs and clear mucus). To identify, look for bright yellow bell-shaped flowers clustered on the top of a thin stem. The small orange lines inside the flower are distinct from its look-alike, oxlips (*Primula elatior*), which have light yellow petals that open out more. The leaves form at the base in a circular arrangement. They are rough in texture and oblong with many creases, sometimes with curled edges. Pick the flowers and use them fresh in salads.

Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), also known as hedge mustard, is a popular one for foragers! You can find it growing in woodlands, hedgerows, or paths across Europe and North America. This plant grows in two forms at different stages of its life (it is biennial). In the first year, the broad, heart-shaped leaves grow more in a rosette and lower on the ground.

In the second year, it grows taller on the stem and the leaves are arrow-shaped and serrated. This plant is hard to confuse with anything else because of the smell of garlic that arises when you crush the leaves. When flowering, it has very delicate white flowers with four petals. The leaves are commonly used in pesto or for seasoning.

Lady's-smock or cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*) is a beautiful flower you can find from April through June. It is grows in North America, western Asia, and Europe, in areas with wet soils, such as

lakesides, wetlands, and near streams. It is said to bloom and its petals to open when the cuckoo starts to crow.

The leaves are commonly used in foods for its peppery wasabi flavor. Add to your next sandwich or wrap for a boost of nutrients and vitamin C. Medicinally, this flower is used for menstrual pains, skin problems, asthma, and indigestion. To identify, look out for four-petaled lilac flowers that have purple veins on them. The bottom of the flower also has a yellow tint.

Oxeye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) are like the big cousins of the English daisy (*Bellis perennis*), which I am sure you are familiar with, as the small delicate white-petaled flowers grow almost everywhere in the Northern Hemisphere. Oxeye daisies can be identified by the same white petals and yellow florets (in the center of the flower), but they are much larger than the English daisy and stand tall from the ground.

These flowers are both edible and medicinal. Traditionally, they have been used externally for treating wounds and internally as an ailment for sore throats and colds. Pick the flower heads and use as a pretty garnish for any dish.

Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) is similar to cowslip except that the flowers are not clustered in a bell shape. They are much lower on the ground near the rosette of leaves, and grow in the center of the leaf rosette. Primrose can be found in North America, Europe, and some of North Africa. Primrose comes in many colors, but white and yellow are the most common when growing wild, in shady woodland or field edges. This plant is known for its mild sedative and pain relief properties. The flowers are edible and used decoratively for food and drink; they are also used for relaxing and soothing. The leaves and roots are good for expelling mucus, so are good for colds, coughs, or bronchitis. Pick the flowers and make a tea or use some to dress a salad.

Red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) is an edible and medicinal plant that contains phytoestrogens, which increase estrogen in the body. The flowers

make a balancing brew, especially for women during menstruation. This immunity- and lymphatic-supporting plant is perfect as a tea. Be sure to double check before using if you take hormone-related medicine or are pregnant. Turn to here for more information about red clover.

Ribgrass plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) can be identified by its seed head growing tall on its stem with a base of leaves. Ribgrass, also known as ribwort, has four ridges on each leaf.

Broadleaf plantain (*Plantago major*), as the name suggests, has broad, rounded leaves. You will find both ribgrass and broadleaf plantain in meadows, gardens, sand dunes, sides of paths, and woodlands in Europe, North America, and Asia. Known for their benefits as decongestants and an antiseptic, and for anti-inflammatory properties, both species can be used steamed as a mist or in teas to fight respiratory infections. They are also cultivated for feeding livestock. More traditionally, the leaves are used as a

rub or made into an ointment to treat nettle stings and insect bites. Interestingly, you can often find plantain growing very close to nettles.

TREES

SAP

Birch (*Betula* spp.) is a common tree with many species. Some of the more well known, such as silver birch (*Betula pendula*), can be found across Europe and Asia, whereas the cherry birch (*Betula lenta*) grow in Europe and the US. Birch can be recognized by its striped, lined bark; or in some species, such as silver birch or Himalayan birch, by their white bark; others, such as cherry birch and water birch (*Betula occidentalis*), have a red bark. During early spring, the trees have a flow of sap that can be tapped. Once collected, the sap can be drunk neat (raw), or mixed with drinks by boiling it down until it thickens into a syrup. Sap from these trees is full of amino acids and minerals (potassium, magnesium, and manganese) and antioxidants.

BARK

Willow (*Salix* spp.) is a tree with over four hundred species. They can usually be found by riverbanks or in areas of moist soil. These beautiful

trees, which grow across Europe, North America, and Asia, can help draw water from waterlogged soils. The long drooping ("weeping") branches are a signature characteristic of the willow tree, one that most people are probably familiar with. Pussy willow (*Salix discolor*) is one species of willow known for its salicin content, which is what aspirin is synthesized from. The bark has been used to treat mild pains and inflammation. You can identify pussy willow by its early spring sign, its catkins. Catkins are part of the trees' reproductive system and are soft, gray, and fuzzy, growing upward on their branch. The male catkins also bear small yellow flowers, whereas the female catkins are greener or have turned into white fluff. The leaves are more oval in shape. During early spring, cut a few branches from the pussy willow tree and peel off the inner bark to use in a decoction (see here).

Sustainably Tapping Sap

There are different ways to tap this mineral-packed liquid, but I personally prefer the noninvasive and slower process where you do not have to drill but instead prune about 1¼ to 2 inches (3 to 5 cm) of a branch (maximum 4 inches [10 cm] in diameter), using a pruning saw, and attach some tubing and a bottle at the end, leaving it to collect the sap. This may take a few hours with a steady stream of sap. Once you have collected what you will use, seal the open end of the branch with birch wax, beeswax, or pruning sealant. This is to not let the sap run out. This method can be used for other trees, such as maple. I would advise not to be excessive with this as to not damage the tree's health and also remember not to take more than you will actually use.

CRAFTS AND ACTIVITIES

STOVETOP POTPOURRI

Potpourri is traditionally a mixture of dried plant materials that gives off a subtle yet pleasantly fragrant scent. It's very pretty to look at and can also serve as a decorative piece. You can buy potpourri, or you can just as easily make it with ingredients foraged from the outdoors or found within your home. There are dried potpourris and wet ones; this recipe is for the latter. The beautiful thing about this season is that you'll find all sorts of loveliness blossoming, including some plants from previous chapters.

Honeysuckle (*Lonicera* spp.) grows as a shrub in hedgerows and woodlands, as well as planted in gardens in Europe, North Africa, North America, and some of Asia. You can find it as late as summertime, depending on where you are. When you forage for these beautiful flowers, pick during early morning or evening to get a stronger aroma. There are many species of honeysuckle, each with different uses and applications. A

variety to look out for is the common honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), whose flowers have pink and yellow tones. Honeysuckle is used for aromatherapy and is believed to reduce stress and balance mood. Add to your potpourri when in need of a spiritual lift.

Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*). A popular plant used for aromatherapy and relaxation, lavender is sold in some grocery stores, health food stores, or online, though you might already have some growing in your or a friend's garden. You will find lavender wild in the Mediterranean, and cultivated and grown worldwide. Research shows that lavender oils reduce cortisol, the stress-causing hormone. Include lavender in your potpourri for tranquility, healing, purification, and happiness.

Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) is a wonderful plant to add to your potpourri because of the lovely aroma it gives, not to mention the spiritual benefits of cleansing negative energy from your space, which can lead to having more lucid dreams. Named after Artemis, the Greek goddess of wild animals, vegetation, childbirth, and the hunt, mugwort is imbued with powerful feminine energy. It has been used historically as a uterine tonic and to encourage menstruation. Add to your potpourri for a touch of the divine feminine. Read more about this plant here.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*). Rosemary is cultivated and grown worldwide and can also be found growing at sides of hedges and front gardens depending where distributed, and sandy coasts of North America. You can also find it fresh or dried in your local health food stores, if easier for you. Rosemary is a popular plant that has been used to combat mental stagnation and improve memory. A staple in many people's herb gardens, it has also been known to clear one's aura, and, like lavender, it has been proven to reduce cortisol. Add rosemary to your potpourri to stimulate the mind and boost memory.

Ingredients:

½ cup (30 g) fresh honeysuckle flowers
3 sprigs lavender
3 sprigs mugwort
3 sprigs rosemary
½ cup (50 g) fresh orange, lemon, or lime peel
3 cups (710 ml) water

Materials:

Medium-size to large pot

Instructions:

Combine your ingredients in a pot and cover with water. Leave the pot over a medium-low heat, or at a simmer, for however long you'd like, or until the fragrance is overpowering. Set your intentions and allow the herbal aroma to fill your home.

Enhance this activity by opening your windows and imagining any negative or unwanted energy leaving.

BOTANICAL SYRUPS

Just like our autumn Pick-Me-Up Syrup (here), here is a syrup infused with botanical finds of the season. For a gorgeous syrup, try making with sweet violets. For culinary use and flavor, try rose.

Rose (*Rosa* spp.) Infuse rose into your syrup for fragrance, flavor, and medicinal benefits. Refer to the rose entry here.

Sweet violet (*Viola odorata*). Read more about this wildflower here.

Ingredients:

17½ ounces (500 g) rose petals or violet flowers
1 cup plus 2 tablespoons (250 ml) water
1¼ cups (250 g) sugar
Optional: 3 drops freshly squeezed lemon juice, for a reddish-purple color in violet syrup

Materials:

Pot or teakettle

Medium-size heatproof bowl

Strainer

Sterilized jar or bottle

Instructions:

Place the flowers in a heatproof bowl. Heat your water until it starts to boil then pour over your flowers. Let sit overnight.

Set the floral-infused water over a pot of boiling water (to create a double boiler), add the sugar, and let dissolve slowly. If you used violets, add the lemon juice now.

Strain and let cool, then store your syrup in a sterilized jar or bottle. You can keep it in the fridge for a good 6 months. Use your syrup by adding it to baked goods or to spruce up your drinks.

PLANT-INFUSED CHOCOLATES

There is no shortage of wild resources this time of year, from berries to fruits to greens. The ingredients in this recipe are commonly found in spring and easy to identify for beginners. Infusing some of these plant ingredients into chocolate will provide a tasty treat, with extracted plant benefits and flavor.

Ingredients:

3 cups (710 ml) milk

1 cup (200 g) sugar or 1 cup syrup of choice—why not use your botanical syrup? (Check out the recipe here for botanical syrups.)

1 cup (40 to 80 g) plants and flowers; e.g., rose, mugwort, meadowsweet *(Filipendula ulmaria),* dandelion, or violet

Rounded ⅓ cup (40 g) unsweetened cocoa powder

Rounded 1½ cups (200 g) cornstarch, plus more if needed

Optional additions for the fruit mixture: chocolate chunks, honey, or bay leaves

1 cup (150 to 190 g) fruits of choice; e.g., blackberries, damson or other plums, crab apples, gooseberries, or wild raspberries (chopped)

Materials:

2 medium-size pans

Whisk

Strainer

Silicone chocolate molds

Instructions:

Flower Chocolates:

In one pan, heat your milk and sugar low and slow until the sugar is dissolved. If you are using syrup, add to your milk and heat low, omitting the dissolving step. Add your flowers for a gentle infusion. Strain out the flowers into a bowl and return the infused milk to the pan. Whisk the cocoa powder into your milk. Now, add your cornstarch and bring to boil. Boil for 5 minutes while whisking slowly and constantly until everything is nicely mixed, giving you a thick, smooth texture.

Fruit Chocolates:

Repeat the steps above but instead of 1 cup of plants and flowers use 1 cup of fruits of choice.

When everything is mixed together, remove both pans from the heat and let the two pans cool down, stirring every now and then to prevent clumps of chocolate from forming. Once everything is cool, pour the flower mixture into some of the molds and the fruit mixture into the remaining molds.

If you want half-and-half effect, fill each mold only halfway up with one mixture, chill in the freezer for 1 hour, then add some of the other mixture on top and place back in the freezer for a few hours.

Once they are frozen, you can enjoy your treats on a hot day.

DYED EASTER EGGS

Dying or staining eggs for Easter is a fun activity for the whole family, and can easily turn into a springtime family ritual.

For Orthodox Christians, dyed red eggs during Easter have been said to represent the blood that flowed from Christ's body on the cross, while the egg itself was a symbol of Christ's rebirth. But the significance of the egg predates Christianity. Since ancient times, the spring equinox has been celebrated as a period of renewal, the egg a symbol of rebirth invoking Ostara, a pagan goddess of spring and fertility. In Ghana, eggs are part of a dish called *eto*, or *oto*, which is eaten during naming ceremonies, birthdays, and weddings, all events that celebrate some kind of pivotal transition from old to new.

This craft can be done just as easily with natural dyes purchased from the store.

Hibiscus (*Hibiscus syriacus*), commonly also known as rose of Sharon, it is part of the mallow family (Malvaceae) meaning it can increase the movement of mucus and is therefore used for medicinal purposes as a diuretic as well as for respiratory ailments. You may find these growing sporadically as they are native to Asia and were introduced to such places as the UK and North America. When the flowers are used to dye eggs, you can get a deep to light blue. Combining the leaves, flowers, and stem yields a dark green to black.

Repeat the following instructions for however many dyes you'd like to make to dye eggs. Use one plant source per batch of dye.

Ingredients:

2 cups (475 ml) filtered water
Beet, chopped: purple or dark pink
Hibiscus: light to dark blue (flowers only) or dark green to black (flowers, leaves, and stems)
Onion skins: rusty orange
Red cabbage, chopped: light blue
Spring greens (plantain, dandelion leaves, spinach, etc.): green
Turmeric, ground: yellow
1 teaspoon (5 ml) distilled white vinegar
Hard-boiled eggs

Materials:

Medium-size to large pot

Fine strainer

Bowl large enough for your quantity of eggs to be dyed

Empty egg carton or bowl for finished eggs

Instructions:

Bring a large pot of water to a boil, then add your chosen ingredient for the color of dye you wish to achieve. Let simmer for 20 minutes over medium heat. Remove from the heat and leave the ingredients in the water for 20 minutes to cool down and continue extracting color.

When it comes to natural dyes, you really can't overdo it. More is more and less is less when it comes to the color saturation you're going for with whatever ingredient you're working with.

Strain your dye once it's cooled and pour into a bowl. Add the vinegar. Submerge your eggs in the dye and leave in the fridge until your desired color is reached. This can be few hours or overnight. Remove from the dye, then present or store in an old egg carton or bowl (we put ours in a small basket nest).

These eggs are perfectly safe to eat, or you can play a game: Try to see whose eggshell doesn't break when tapped with an opponent's egg. Each person will use one end of their egg (smaller end vs. large end). The person with the "strongest" egg wins.

TRADITIONS AND RITUALS

BELTANE

Beltane is an ancient Gaelic festival of fire, named after Bel, the Celtic god of fire, and is celebrated halfway between the spring and summer equinox, on May 1. May Day, a holiday you might be more familiar with, has its roots in Beltane, which was revived during the 1980s and has seen a resurgence in observance and popularity among modern-day witches. This festival commemorates the return of light, life, and fertility, while welcoming the end of spring and beginning of summer.

In ancient times, herdsmen lit bonfires to honor the return of the sun after a long, dark winter. People engaged in dancing and feasting around the fire, and would watch as smoke ascended to the skies in ritual purification.

A tradition of Beltane that emerged later entailed collecting hawthorn branches and decorating them with wildflowers to make flower crowns. The tree itself was sometimes decorated with ribbons as gifts for fairies, known in Gaelic as the *aos sí*, who were thought to be especially devious during this time. Out of these traditions and the significance that the hawthorn accrued over time—as a symbol of protection, hope, luck, and joy—the tree became known as the May tree, or the May flower. The *Mayflower*, the ship that carried Puritans from England to America to escape religious persecution, was named after the hawthorn. Make your own flower crown by modifying the wreath craft here; or light a candle, and as the wick burns down, imagine your worries and stresses melting away. What does renewal mean to you? In what ways do you hope to be “reborn” in this season?

HOLI

Every spring in India, people gather to celebrate this festival of colors, also known as the festival of love or the festival of spring. During this holiday, which takes place in February or March, depending on when the date falls in the Hindu calendar, people throw colored water and powders on one another, staining their skin and clothes in gorgeous, vibrant hues. This feels incredibly fitting for a season in which colors naturally abound with the blossoming of flowers and trees. The origins of this festival come from Indian mythology. The exact traditions and legends vary throughout India, but the theme of good over evil is consistent throughout, and is the main reason people celebrate.

In India and around the world, people gather around bonfires, sharing food and drink, dancing and singing late into the night. It might seem simple, the joy that colors can bring into our lives, but even a cursory search of Holi on the internet generates such joyful images that one can't help but smile. Colors have long been associated with different emotions and energies. Here are some common associations, but feel free to make your own based on your own experience:

Red: passion, creativity, love, intense feeling

Orange: creativity, excitement, fun

Yellow: happiness, hope, youthfulness

Green: growth, vitality, peace

Blue: comfort, calm, rational feeling

Purple: royalty, decadence, rich feeling

Pink: softness, flirtation, sweetness

Brown: sophistication, warmth, strength

White: purity, freshness, renewal

Black: mystery, endings, death

The next time you're out foraging, pay attention to colors. Engage your mystical brain and reflect on what these colors might mean, what message Nature might be trying to send you. Take into consideration colors and their

association while wildcrafting as well. What energy or emotion are you trying to invite with, for instance, yellow herb Bennet or purple herb-Robert? If colors have a way of symbolizing certain emotions, then we can use Nature to honor how we feel or invite different emotions to come into our lives.

SUMMER
Dandelion
Honey

It's summertime, and the living is easy, breezy—unless you are not good at coping with the heat, like me, and prefer the colder months of the year. Even with the persistent heat, there is a lot to appreciate in this season. Most of us have some time off work to spend time with family and friends, or to nurture our gardens, the land, and ourselves. Summer is magical in its own way, and is a critical time as it is the main growing period for plants. Summer days are long due to how far Earth's poles are from the sun. Mother Nature is fully awake and brimming with motion. Trees dance in the summer breeze, inviting us to climb. Young shoots appear, making some of the best parts of a plant that you can forage, but always bear in mind to be considerate of the plant, the animals you share this medicine and food with, and also the land—during this abundant and magical period, think about true sustainability.

I started writing this part of the book while visiting Devon, in southwest England, for the summer, looking out at the sheep sitting on the hills in front of me and asking myself, *What does summer mean for me?* This time brings an appreciation for bounty, much like spring. The increased greenery of the land, and the solar power that invigorates us, giving us energy, cannot be ignored. There is a sense of freedom during summertime. Our inner child gleams with the anticipation of a fun-filled few months; meanwhile, our grown-up selves are satisfied by the chance to rest.

Keep an open mind as you approach this most magical (if hot) season.

SEASONAL TIPS

- **Extra hydration.** As the weather fluctuates and we move around more, we need to stay hydrated, especially on the hotter days of the year. After all, we are like flowers and need to be watered to flourish.

- **Get some sun.** Our body is enriched by vitamin D from the sun. Vitamin D is a key part of leading a healthy and less sluggish life. It strengthens our bones, teeth, and muscles. Obviously, don't expect to get all your vitamin D from the sun, or stay in the sun for too long, as that will have adverse skin effects.

- **Wear sunscreen.** While you're soaking up vitamin D, don't forget to protect your skin. If you plan to be in the sun, make sure you're wearing sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher.

- **Allergies.** Now that everything is in full bloom, you may feel your itchy nose, which was already bad in spring, get worse in the summer. Your allergies may intensify in summer due to animals, pollen, and dust. Try some natural antihistamines, such as a stinging nettle (here) tea, or fruits that are high in vitamin C, such as rose hips (here).

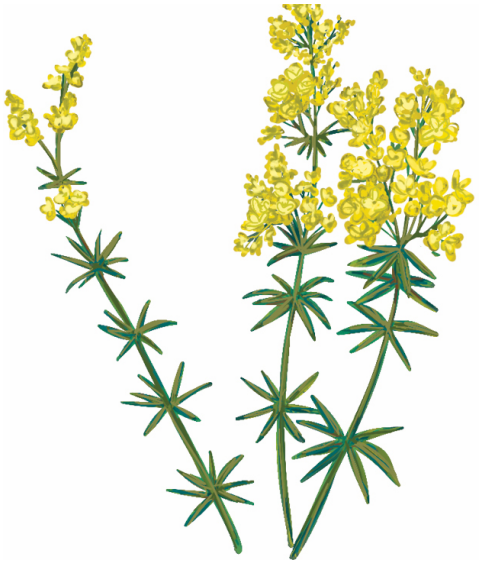
- **Coastal foraging.** Look out for coastal foraging opportunities near you. Salty marshlands are great places to find edible plants. Check your local area first in case there are any restrictions on where you're allowed to forage.

POPULAR ITEMS TO FORAGE

FOLIAGE AND FLORA

Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*), a species of chrysanthemum, is a welcoming and sweet-looking flower that you can find across Europe, the US, and natively in Asia, in various grasslands and hedgerows. It is also known by another Latin name, *Chrysanthemum parthenium*. This plant loves the sun. Its leaves and stem are yellowy green and can be seen shaped pinnately, with the leaves very close together. The stems smell faintly of citrus. The flowers almost look like a large yarrow and chamomile combined, which makes sense because they are all part of the Asteraceae family. Feverfew flowers and leaves have been known to help with fever and headaches, hence the name. It can be used topically as a poultice for headaches and toothaches, probably because of its antiseptic properties. Turn to here for a poultice recipe in which you can substitute feverfew. You can enjoy it in salad or as a tea, but be warned of its bitter taste. Use it as an insect repellent by making a tea infusion and then dabbing the cooled liquid

on your skin. Some caution is advised with feverfew, as some people are allergic and experience hay fever–like symptoms, such as sneezing, mild skin rashes, or mild throat irritation.



Lady's bedstraw (*Galium verum*), a sweet vanilla-scented flower, grows in small clusters of tiny yellow flowers. It has four petals and grows upward almost as if tangled together. This plant also has small, thin leaves that grow around the stem. You can find it in the meadows, hedgerows, and fields of Europe, Asia, North Africa, New Zealand, and North America. When foraging, be gentle with the stems. Cut a few inches (centimeters) from the base. You may also come across **hedge bedstraw (*Galium mollugo*)**, which looks like lady's bedstraw but has tiny white flowers instead, and the leaves are a little bit thicker. Both of these are nontoxic, edible plants. They're a lovely external aid for helping the body heal wounds, scars, and also dry skin. You can infuse them into an oil or balm. Find a recipe for a balm here, and for an oil infusion here. Lady's bedstraw has been also used internally to reduce water retention and as a vegan alternative for curdling milk to make cheese.

Meadowsweet *(Filipendula ulmaria)*, also called queen of the meadow, is a beautiful plant that can be found from spring into summer. It can be identified by its clustered white-cream flowers. The leaves are pinnately shaped and dark green. The blossoms look very similar to elderflowers, but don’t grow from a shrub as elderflowers do. Meadowsweet grows in areas with moist to wet soil, so near water banks or lakes. It is native to Europe, though it does turn up in Asia and the US. Meadowsweet provides pain relief and has anti-inflammatory properties due to its salicin content. The lovely flowers also act as a diuretic, anti-inflammatory, antacid, and an aid for respiratory problems. There is no doubt that meadowsweet was known by Druids to be one of the sacred herbs. They used it in rituals and also to sweeten alcoholic beverages. Go ahead and pick the aerial parts and flowers of the plant and enjoy a slow tea infusion. Or infuse it into your desserts and home brews.

Rosebay willow herb (*Epilobium angustifolium*) is a blooming plant, in the evening primrose family, Onagraceae, with gorgeous purple-pink flowers that you can't ignore. This plant, also known by the name fireweed, can be found across Europe and the US. The last time I saw it, I was walking through some overgrown fields. You can also see it in woodlands, sprouting around and through walls, and in other open green areas. Interestingly, it also grows on previously burned land, which could be where it got its alternative name. To identify, look for the clusters of flowers blooming in the middle to end of summer. The leaves can be a key identifier for this plant, which is superhandy when the flowers have not arrived yet. The leaves are thin and long with veins that do not quite reach the edge of the leaf but instead join together near the edge. The purple-pink flowers have reddish seed heads that grow along its red stem. The leaves and shoots can be cooked and eaten alongside other greens for a meal that is rich in vitamins A and C. The flowers are also edible as well as medicinal, known to help with asthma symptoms and coughs.

Saint-John's-wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) can be found just about everywhere, including North Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. I've noticed it on walks through fields, in gardens, pathsides, meadows, and on dry soils. Look for its small yellow flowers with five petals and lots of long yellow stamens. To harvest, cut or pick just the flower, or harvest smaller stems along with the flowers and leaves, as both can be used. It is believed to be helpful for minor muscle and nerve pain, as well as helping to soothe itchy skin. Check out here for instructions to make a skin oil. The component hypericum is what turns this plant red when the flowers are crushed, a color that you'll see if you infuse them fresh in an oil. The flower can also be used internally for its antiviral, antidepressive, and antitumor properties. Infuse alone in a tea, and you'll see the red color.

FRUITS

Crab apples, previously mentioned in the winter discussion, may also be found throughout summer, depending on your location. Turn to here for a refresher on crab apples.

Sea buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) grows throughout Europe, Asia, and the upper US Midwest as part of hedgerows or in woodlands or fields. Its small orange berries stand out very much and its leaves are thin, dark green, and thornlike in appearance, especially from a distance. Look for the clusters of orange berries tightly packed along each individual stem. The leaves can be identified by their silvery green color. The shade of the leaves and the shape of the berry can differ slightly for different varieties of this shrub; however, all have elliptically shaped leaves with a line running from top to bottom. Sea buckthorn is commonly used in cordials, jams, syrups, and as a tea either fresh or dried. Its berries are tart and sour, but its flowers and leaves are used for medicinal reasons. It is a source of vitamins A, B_{12}, and C as well as omega-3-, -6 and -7 fatty acids. It is praised by nutritionists and I can definitely see why, as it can provide a boost of vitamins and lower blood pressure. Used externally as an oil or cream, it will help speed the healing of small burns. Maybe this could make an addition to a forager's or herbalist's first-aid kit.

COASTAL FORAGING

If you live near a coastal area or are planning a summer vacation near the coast, there are lots of goodies you can forage. The difference in terrain can provide a wonderful new outlook on foraging.

The abundance of nutrients in different coastal environments create an

ideal habitat for plants to grow and thrive.

Coastal wormwood (*Artemisia suksdorfii*), like its sibling, the common mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) (here), can be identified by the silver underside of its leaves and the clusters of aromatic flowers near the tip of the stems, which bloom yellow in the summer. It grows along the coasts of North America. Use this plant the same way you'd use mugwort: for food, to support skin health, or to invite lucid dreaming experiences.

Sea kelp (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) is a type of sea plant, specifically algae, which you may find at the beach this summer. It can be found in North America—but also in various other parts of the world. Kelp can grow up to about 40 inches (1 m) long. When identifying, you will notice the edges have spikelike features. The color is generally a brownish green and sometimes has small specks. Kelp is packed with nutrients, such as iodine, calcium, and vitamins A, B_{12}, C, and K. It can be eaten dried, fried, cooked, raw, or powdered or in capsules as a supplement.

Sea lettuce (*Ulva lactuca*) is a type of seaweed easily recognized on the beach by its light green and crinkly appearance—which very much resembles lettuce. It varies in length, but can grow up to 16 inches (40 cm) long. Sea lettuce can be found in a variety of places across the globe from South Asia to Europe and the coasts of America. It may be drifting on rocky shores and collecting itself in a bunch with other seaweed. Keep in mind that when it is darker, it is probably old, so pick vibrant green ones. Like other types of seaweed, sea lettuce is nutritious, packed with protein, minerals, and amino acids. Because of its peppery flavor, it is commonly used in salads, soups, dried, fried, or powdered as seasoning.

CRAFTS AND ACTIVITIES

NETTLE CORD BRACELETS

Summer is the best time to harvest nettles (read more about them here) for their fibers. Removed from the pith (material inside the center of the stem), it can be used as string—for making bracelets or something else. You can produce cord of varied strength using nettle, but the stems of other plants work well, too, such as from plantain, raspberry, burdock, rosebay willow herb, and dandelion.

With nettles being so common in summer, growing in just about every place you can think of from gardens to fields to hedgerows, there should not be a shortage of this nonfussy weed.

These bracelets can also double up as a key chain accessory.

Ingredients:

Long, fresh nettles

Materials:

Gardening gloves
Medium-size stone
Bucket of water
Beads or charms or any other adornments you prefer

Instructions:

First, you'll need to prepare the nettle stems. Do this by wearing gardening gloves and rubbing the leaves and bristly hairs off the

stem until completely removed. Flatten the stem by hitting it with a stone and open the stem lengthwise along its center. Peel out and discard the inner pith (the woody yellowish center). You should be left with long strips of fibers. These should look like four long strips for each stem. Repeat these steps with each stem you have.

Next, leave the fibers for few hours to dry naturally. Take one fiber at a time and fold in half. Pinch each side with your thumb and index finger, and twist and form a loop and tie to secure.

Here is where you add your own personal touch. Now that you have a few cords, you can either repeat the twisting process to bind them together, creating a thicker cord, or keep as a thinner cord. You can decorate with any beads or charms ready to wear, or use to spruce up your set of keys.

You can try this method with other fibrous stems; I have tried with bramble and it works well.

DANDELION “HONEY”

Try this recipe for sweet, solar- and plant-infused goodness that also happens to be vegan.

Make a honey substitute using the abundance of dandelion heads you’ll find this time of year. For a refresher on dandelions, refer to here.

Ingredients:

10½ ounces (300 g) dandelion heads
1 orange, chopped (optional)
1 small lemon, chopped
1½ cups (355 ml) water
1½ cups (300 g) sugar

Materials:

Medium-size to large pot
Strainer
Heatproof bowl
Jar

Instructions:

Put the petals, chopped orange (if using), and lemon in a pot of water and boil on medium heat until bubbling slightly. Strain into a heatproof bowl, then return the liquid to the pot, add the sugar, and boil again for 20 minutes. Pour in a glass jar and let cool down.

Store in a cool, dark place and enjoy on your toast.

NETTLE ENERGY BALLS

Nettles leaves are not the only part of the plant picked for their nutritional and medicinal benefits. Their seeds provide an energetic boost, due to their adaptogen nature. Adaptogens, found in certain wild foods, help manage stress and fatigue. The nettle seeds in this recipe can boost your energy

quickly on the go. You'll find the seeds drooping on the nettle stem at about this time of the year. Pick the green seeds and use dried or fresh. Be sure to not overpick seeds, as this is a key part of the plant's reproductive system and we want to see more of these plant allies flourish.

Ingredients:

½ cup (86 g) nettle seeds, ground or crushed
1 cup (80 g) rolled oats (these help with exhaustion; the carbohydrates from oats provide a boost of energy)
½ cup (130 g) peanut butter (helps hold everything together)
¼ cup (43 g) plantain seeds (from any member of *Plantago* spp.)
¼ cup (85 g) honey
¼ cup (30 g) chocolate flakes or cacao nibs

Materials:

Grinder or mortar and pestle
Bowl

Instructions:

Use a spice grinder or mortar and pestle to grind your seeds.

Combine all the ingredients in your bowl, mix together, and form into 1¼-inch (3 cm) balls with your hands. Alternatively, use an ice-cream scoop to form the balls.

Keep in the fridge and enjoy.

PROPAGATED HERBS

Do you want to grow your own herbs? Does your family or friend have an abundance of lavender or rosemary in their garden? Propagating herbs and even some plants are the best way to grow your own.

I find that when I propagate an herb, I have to take more than one to three cuttings, as not all will produce roots. This is something to bear in mind. Also keep an eye on the water level. Don't let your cuttings get thirsty or moldy; provide fresh water every day. Be patient. It can take about two or more weeks to grow sufficient roots before you can pot your herb.

My suggestions for which herbs to propagate include:
Mint • Lemon balm • Rosemary • Sage • Thyme

Materials:

Knife
Jar
3½-inch (9 cm) flowerpot
Compost

Instructions:

The simplest way to propagate some of these herbs will be to use a clean knife to cut about four to six young stems, making sure their total length is approximately 4 inches (10 cm).

Remove any leaves from the bottom 1¼ inch (3 cm) of the stem.

For plants with harder woody stems (e.g., rose-mary), remove some of the harder outer layer by scraping some of it off until you see the green layer.

Fill a small jar with clean water and place your cuttings inside, making sure that all the stems are submerged in the water.

Leave in a place with a good light source, such as a windowsill.

Once a few roots have appeared, more than likely over 2 weeks later, transfer to a 3½-inch (9 cm) flowerpot filled with compost and let grow.

SOLAR SEASON SKIN OIL

During this time of the year, we can turn to skin care as a way of making ourselves feel loved and boosted by plant power. I used to make this oil quite a lot when I first moved to Oxford, as the ingredients grew in abundance in our garden. I love the process of creating my own floral skin oils. They smell and are divine. They make me feel charged with the sun, especially because of their golden color. Hopefully, you'll feel the same way once you make yours.

We can forage beautiful flowers that benefit our skin and also smell radiant. Macerating these in carrier oils is how we make floral oils, which can last 6 to 12 months. If we use fresh plants, this time may be shorter, but storing in a cool, dark place can prevent your oil from becoming rancid. If you use dried plants, store on a windowsill to infuse in the sun's rays. If you use fresh Saint-John's-wort flowers, you will get a nice red tint to your oil.

Ingredients:

2 cups (480 ml) light carrier oil (for more on carrier oils, see here)
1 cup (40 to 80 g) with flowers of choice: e.g., feverfew, rose, cowslips, or lady's bedstraw

Materials:

1½-pint (750 ml) jar
Label
Strainer or cheesecloth
Large bowl
Funnel
Small bottles

Instructions:

Place your ingredients in a jar, label, and then leave on a windowsill for 4 weeks, then strain and squeeze the excess oil from the flowers into a bowl using a funnel and store the infused oil in small bottles. Use morning and night, or whenever you need a glow. Imagine the solar power infused in the oil brightening you up with its energy.

FLORAL ICE CUBES

Here is a quick and easy way to add a little extra something to your drinks this summer. If you're like me and don't do well in the heat, be sure to stock up on these fancy ice cubes that add just a touch of magic to any cold drink.

Ingredients:

Water

A selection of small edible flowers, such as cowslips, primrose, or lavender

Materials:

Ice cube trays or molds

Instructions:

Fill your ice cube trays or molds with water, then submerge your chosen flower(s) in the water and freeze. Use when needed. Tip: For extra fun, use molds of different shapes.

FRUIT LEATHERS

This is a fun and easy craft to make some delicious homemade sweets. If you have kids, I am sure they will love this. Go out for a walk together and forage for some fruits, or use up fruits you have in your pantry. Choose which fruits you'd like to use based on your preferred taste; this is a good chance to experiment with flavors.

Ingredients:

2 to 3 cups (300 to 450 g, depending on the fruit) elderberries, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, hawthorn berries, plums, or crab apples. You can use frozen fruit, too, if you do not have fresh on hand.

½ cup (120 ml) water

2 tablespoons (40 g) honey (optional)

1 tablespoon (about 7 g) ground spice(s), such as cinnamon (optional)

Materials:

Knife

Pot large enough to hold the fruits

Sieve

Large bowl

Baking parchment

Baking sheet

Dehydrator (optional)

String

Instructions:

Cut and prepare the fruits for cooking, removing any pits. Place the fruits and water in your pot and cook over medium heat for 10 minutes, remove from the heat, and sieve to remove the pulp,

mashing as much as you can through the sieve and then disposing of the remaining pulp. Spread on a parchment paper–lined baking sheet and put in the oven set to 200°F (93°C). Alternatively, place on dehydrator trays and place in a dehydrator about 140°F (60°C), set following the manufacturer’s instructions for the temperature to dry fruit leather. If using an oven, dry until shiny, nonsticky, and rollable; if using a dehydrator, dry for 6 hours or per the manufacturer’s instructions. Once ready, remove from the oven or dehydrator and allow to cool down. Then, cut to your desired width and roll up. You can roll with its parchment paper as a wrapper, or tie it with a string. Store in a cool, dark, and dry place.

TRADITIONS AND RITUALS

SANZIENE

Sanziene is a Romanian holiday observed every June 24 that celebrates love and the sun. According to legend, fairies known as Sanzienele would imbue plants with their magical powers on this day, amplifying the plants' medicinal qualities. The lady's bedstraw blossom, called *sânziană* in Romanian, can be found in abundance during this time, and was one of the plants thought to become especially potent with fairy magic at the time of Sanziene. The festivities of this holiday, mostly celebrated in the countryside these days, involve dancing and playing games around a fire, making flower crowns out of lady's bedstraw, and harvesting plants that have medicinal benefits.

Summer, like all things in life, is fleeting, and so is its bounty of fresh flowers and new growth. Before you know it, autumn will be here again. While the fairies are out spreading their magic, take advantage of what Nature provides, both physically, in the form of harvesting natural resources, and spiritually. How do you feel when you're outdoors, walking through an abundant world? What are you learning about yourself in this season that you plan to take with you into the next? Reflect on your experiences by writing them down in a journal.

MIDSUMMER

Midsummer Day, likewise June 24, is also known as Saint John the Baptist Day as the holiday blends with the Christian holiday honoring the birth of the prophet, is a celebration of the summer solstice, the longest day of the

year. A national holiday in Sweden and Finland, where it is called Midsommer, its festivities typically last a few days, people gathering to dance around a maypole of vines and flowers, and otherwise enjoying outdoor activities, celebrating the light, the sun, and the fertility of summer. In some places, bonfires are lit ceremoniously.

The beauty of the season is acknowledged with flower wreaths that men and women wear throughout the joyous occasion.

Of course, there is feasting—pickled vegetables and seafood—and drinking late into the night. Midsummer is a wonderful way of welcoming the summer and entering it with high spirits.

You could have your own summer solstice celebration, or any summer day celebration, by foraging flowers and decorating your home with them. Flowers, besides having a soothing scent, have a way of brightening up any room. Create a small flower arrangement with your finds, or weave them together to form a flower crown.

This season is precious. Find ways to enjoy and be present for it while it lasts, before the days grow short, and nights, long again.

CONCLUSION

We've come to the end of this book, but hopefully this is either the beginning of a journey or a stop along the way toward reconnecting with Nature, or folk practices, or your inner child—whatever it is that got you interested in foraging in the first place. What is more powerful than embracing the inherent uses of plants and trees? What is more powerful than being in tune with our home and our beautiful planet?

Foraging has allowed me to derive comfort from Mother Nature. Knowing how vast our Earth is, how there is so much to learn and discover, centers me and keeps my mind off the stresses of daily life. It's also gratifying to educate myself on the wild resources and natural medicine all around us. I find hope in the changing seasons, in the way plants persevere through winter to sprout again come spring. It makes me feel that I, too, can come out on the other side of whatever it is I'm going through. As a scientist, I tend to think in literal and exacting terms, but there's much to be said about the sense of reverence that comes from the process of foraging and wildcrafting, especially when there is an aim to be sustainable in your practice. Trying to understand the world of plants and how we can live in harmony with them is important to me. I hope it's important to you too. I believe that if you start to forage for the right reasons, you will discover more of yourself and cultivate a profound gratitude for all that we have, all that Nature offers.

Go forth on your enchanted journey.

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